



Gloucestershire Local History Association

Newsletter No. 5 January 2014



A medieval sheep house being excavated alongside the 'Horse and Groom' Inn at Bourton on the Hill in 2013, prior to a car park extension. An Open Day at the excavation on 12th October attracted over 200 people, including many members of the nearby Blockley Heritage Society, which will host a lecture about the excavation by the archaeologist in charge, Chiz Harvard, later this year. See page 6 of this Newsletter for more on the history of Blockley and its Heritage Society.

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News from the GLHA

GLHA Forum, 2nd December 2013

Thirty-two people, representing 28 of the Association's current membership of 44 local history organisations attended the quarterly Forum at Gloucestershire Archives on Monday 2nd December.

The meeting began with a presentation by Grant Repshire, the F. W. Harvey researcher at Exeter University, on the extensive collection of material relating to the Gloucestershire poet and broadcaster, Frederick William Harvey (1888-1957), which has recently been deposited at Gloucestershire Archives, where Grant – who is preparing a doctoral thesis on aspects of Harvey's work - is based. There was also an opportunity for those present to see a selection of original items from the collection, which includes a play by Harvey which is to be performed at the Everyman Theatre this year as part of the HLF-supported 'Gloucestershire Remembers WW1' project. Grant would be happy to answer any further questions about the Archive and can be contacted by email: jgr203@exeter.ac.uk.

During the formal part of the meeting, the Chairman reported on a number of recent GLHA activities, including the 25th of November workshop on Computing for Local Historians organised by Ray Wilson and held at the Archives, to both of whom the GLHA is most grateful. This was attended by 16 people from various groups and societies, and covered a wide range of topics, including organising information, types of software, dealing with images, desktop publishing, PDF creation, data storage, web pages, security, performing system restores and the use of social networking. Further workshops – perhaps focusing on specific historical topics – will certainly be organised in due course.

The Chairman also reported on the GLHA's 2013 Local History Day on 'Gloucestershire's Special Houses' and thanked members for returning their Evaluation Forms, 26 of which had been received – their comments would be very helpful in planning the 2014 Day, which would focus on 'The Effects of World War 1 on Gloucestershire Communities'. This will be held on 11th October 2014, and further details will be circulated to GLHA members as soon as they are available. He also reported on the ways in which GLHA would be involved in the wider HLF-supported 'Gloucestershire Remembers WW1' project, particularly in helping to promote the various training

days and other initiatives at Gloucestershire Archives.

The Treasurer reported on the Association's current (healthy) financial position, the current assets now standing at £1,010 – and also reported a £1 profit on the 2103 Local History Day! Reports were also received from Gloucestershire Archives and the County History Trust.

Draft Minutes of the meeting have been circulated to GLHA members, and the next Forum will be held, at Gloucestershire Archives – whose hospitality is always appreciated – at 2pm on Monday, 3rd March 2014. It will include a presentation by Dr Ollie Taylor, the 'Gloucestershire Remembers WW1' Project Officer on the various events and initiatives to be held across the County during 2014.

GLHA Committee 2013-14

The Chairman was pleased to report at the December Forum that Janet Hudson, from Stonehouse History Group, had agreed to be co-opted onto the Association's Committee, the current members of which are as follows –

Chairman: Steven Blake, Bristol & Gloucestershire Archaeological Society

Secretary: Vicki Walker, Stonehouse History Group

Treasurer: David Scriven, Cheltenham Local History Society

Member: Alison Hobson, Fairford History Society

Member: Mary Sullivan, Forest of Dean Local History Society

Co-opted member: Nicholas Holland, Archives Trainee, Gloucestershire Archives

Co-opted member: Janet Hudson, Stonehouse History Group

The Committee is elected annually at the Association's AGM, the date of which for 2014 will be 29th May, at 7.30pm in the Frith Centre at Gloucestershire Archives.

GLHA Dates for your Diary 2014

Forum meetings

Monday March 3rd 2.00 pm. WW1 Project Officer Dr Ollie Taylor.

Thursday May 29th 7.30 pm (AGM) Virginia Adsett/Gill Morss, ‘Those were the days’: running object-based reminiscence sessions for adult groups, focussing on ‘the fab ‘50s’.

Thursday Sept 4th 7.30 pm Speaker to be arranged.

Monday Dec 1st 2.00 pm John Putley, Gloucestershire Archives.

Events

Local History Day 11th October 2014 - ‘The Effects of World War 1 on Gloucestershire Communities’.

Local History Summer Afternoon 12th July 2014 – Forest of Dean.

Local History Day October 2015 - ‘Immigration and Emigration’.

Local History Summer Afternoon July 2015, date and venue to be announced.

Newsletter deadlines

March 14th – pub April.

June 13th – pub July.

September 19th – pub October.

December 19th - pub January.

Committee meetings

Weds April 23rd 2.00 pm.

Weds July 23rd 2.00 pm.

Thurs Sept 4th 4.00 pm.

Features

GLHA 'Behind the Scenes' visit to Gloucestershire Archives, 13th January 2014

Thirty people from GLHA's member groups attended an afternoon 'Behind the Scenes' tour and archive display at Gloucestershire Archives on Monday, 13th January. As with the previous GLHA tour, those present were treated to a fascinating afternoon, in the company of archivists Sarah Aitken, Vicky Thorpe and Helen Timlin, to all of whom we are most grateful. Particular care had clearly been taken in selecting items for the archive display, which had been chosen to reflect the areas that those attending came from, including Blockley, Charlton Kings, Chipping Campden, Cirencester, Gloucester, Maisemore, Uley and Winchcombe. Many of those present were certainly surprised to discover how extensive the Archives' storage areas are – and to hear that during the course of the tour they would be walking around half a mile!

The GLHA will certainly be arranging another tour for its members at some point - details will be circulated by email in due course.

Latest News from the Gloucestershire County History Trust

Under the energetic leadership of John Chandler, our recently appointed editor-in-chief, the trust is making very good progress in its aims to complete VCH volumes for the outstanding parishes in the county. John himself has now moved on to Norton, leaving only Twyning to be researched for Volume XIII. Rose Wallis is completing work on Yate's religious history and will soon be investigating neighbouring parishes. In October we appointed Beth Hartland, an experienced medievalist from Ely, to research medieval Cheltenham and Cirencester in parallel. Continuing success in fundraising has enabled us to offer two short contracts. Dr Alex Craven, currently working for VCH Wiltshire, has been appointed to work on Cheltenham 1540-1738 and Dr Antonia Catchpole, who has contributed to VCH Oxfordshire, has been appointed to work on Cirencester 1540-1825. Gloucestershire Archives were recently successful in gaining a grant to catalogue the records of the Cirencester solicitors Sewell, Munnings and Logie and the Trust looks forward to further developing our very successful partnership with the Archives to our mutual benefit.

We are increasingly indebted to GLHA's member societies and individual members, not only for financial contributions, but also to the growing band of volunteer researchers, particularly in Cheltenham and Cirencester, who are already making a difference. Some of their work already appears on our website, found at <http://www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/explore/>. John's two taster sessions for volunteers were very well attended and in order to continue to support and direct them he has set up a VCH Academy with its own website (www.vchglosacademy.org). He has arranged for the Academy to meet for a day once a month in the Frith Centre at the Archives; the first two meetings being 16th January and 13th February. Even if you haven't volunteered yet, you are welcome to come along to find out more. As funds permit we will consider appointing a volunteer coordinator early next year. By then we intend to have an IT system in place which will enable everyone involved in research to record and share their findings. 2014 promises to be an even busier year!

As we seek further funds to enable us to continue our impetus, we are grateful for the continuing support of GLHA because the support of the wider local history community strengthens our applications. Thank you once again.

David Aldred
for the Trustees

Focus on...

Blockley Heritage Society

The Blockley Heritage Society was founded in 1961, originally as the 'Antiquarian Society', but was renamed a few years ago to reflect more accurately what we do, rather than risk being wrongly interpreted as who we are. With over 200 members and headed by chairman Robert Willott and a dozen trustees, the Society runs a series of visits, talks and exhibitions throughout the year and is now engaged in an ambitious programme of expansion. This includes the extension of our new premises, recently refurbished to a high standard through self-help. When complete we will have a permanent home for the display of a wealth of artefacts, many of which are now stored elsewhere. This requires drive, initiative, and finance. We are fortunate to be able to draw on the expertise of a willing team of volunteer accountants, architects, designers and a host of others.



A piano manufactured by John Acock at one of the Blockley mills (now known as Mill Dene) on display at the Society's summer exhibition.

The village of Blockley certainly existed in Anglo-Saxon times and was listed in the Domesday Book. Indeed, we have recently published a new edition of *Blockley Through Twelve Centuries* by resident, centenarian and scholar, the late Harry Icelly. This compact volume has been updated and revised by the Society's president Jeremy Bourne. Geologically, a millennium is but a glimpse of time as highlighted by the discovery of a Plesiosaur fossil dating back to the Jurassic era and other examples are still being found locally.

Roman and mediaeval settlements have been discovered at Upton Wold and Dorn and even to-day, new excavations are taking place close to our local hostelry The Horse and Groom.

Along the Blockley Brook and its tributary the Cole Brook, there were once twelve water mills, now all private houses. During the 18th century most of the watermills were converted to silk throwing, known as 'throwsting', or drawing silk threads off skeins and on to spindles for transport to Coventry, then the centre for silk ribbon.

More recently, we know that General Patton came to Blockley in the run up to the invasion of Normandy. One Society member recalled being summoned by Patton to provide a magic show; his reward was a basket of oranges - a rare treat in 1944. Research continues into this intriguing wartime story, but the whole episode is shrouded in mystery as the Allies made it appear that the landings were to take place on the Pas de Calais and not Normandy. Many Polish refugees came to England and set up home in nearby Northwick in a commune of Nissen huts. We have close links with many former residents and hope to acquire a Nissen hut, both for heritage and storage purposes.



Society president Jeremy Bourne shows children from Blockley Primary School examples of items that would have been used in the home in former times.

As well as preserving and studying the past, we are acutely aware of the need to involve the younger generation to safeguard the future. We have a close liaison with our school, located near the Society's Heritage Centre and have the expert advice of two teachers serving as trustees. In our autumn exhibition 'Down Memory Lane', children took part in a competition to identify domestic implements from the past. They did well, but were distinctly fazed by wringers and butter-pats. Children will be increasingly involved as the village continues to prepare to commemorate the centenary of the outbreak of WW1.

Challenging times in the North Cotswolds – we are on track!

Richard Bates

Book Review

A Week's Holiday in The Forest of Dean

John Bellows

Replica of first edition (1881), with an Introduction by Ian Standing

Holborn House, 2013, £10.00 paperback

"A very pleasant spot is this for a pic-nic; and a note sent beforehand to the keeper's wife will ensure the requisite supply of milk and other *et cetera*." so John Bellows advises visitors walking to Danby Lodge near Yorkley in the first edition of his guide, *A Week's Holiday in The Forest of Dean*. Bellows was the founder of the Gloucester publishing firm which carried his name. He was also a frequent visitor to and an ardent admirer of the Forest.

Using The Speech House as his base, Bellows describes his day trips across the Forest. As a good travel guide should, he provides the reader with historical detail about the Dean generally and the specific places they visit. And being a Victorian gentleman with a keen interest in his surroundings, he also provides lists, for example, of the less common butterflies one might see, and notes on the botany, natural history and geology of the Forest.

I loved the guide's wealth of practical detail, which gives us a clear picture of holidaying in Victorian times. It just isn't the same these days! For example, we learn that the morning post arrives at The Speech House at 7.30am, early enough for correspondence to be dealt with before setting out for the

day. We learn what it costs to hire traps, train times from the numerous stations within the Forest, and the four different ways one can return from Littledean to The Speech House.

But while full of useful information this is not a dry tome by any means. On the contrary, Bellows writes with a gentle sense of humour, often at his own expense, but especially marked when dealing with the “natives”. He finds the local people friendly, full of helpful information and always ready to tell the visitors stories such as their version of the origins of place names.

Bellows was spurred to write his comprehensive guide as the advent of the railways into the area made the journey to the Forest a practical one for the first time. The information he provides on train journeys within the Forest and to places such as Tintern Abbey and Raglan Castle makes the reader realise how much we have lost. It may be much easier to simply hop in the car, and we can always telephone to book a meal at Speech House, but I rather like the idea of being able to “hand a card to the station master at Lydney, en route” if we want to “find lunch laid ready...on arrival.”

The replica edition of “A Week’s Holiday in The Forest of Dean” has an introduction on the life of Bellows and printing notes by Ian Standing, Forest Verderer and a Vice-President of the Forest of Dean Local History Society. To find out about local stockists or to order direct, go to <http://holbornhouse.com>.

Cheryl Mayo

Forest of Dean Local History Society