



Wiltshire Local History Network

Meeting
Wednesday 12 February 2025, 7.30pm
Online via Zoom

Minutes

Present: Julie Davis (Chair), Ally McConnell (WSHC), Tim Couzens, Ruth Newman, David Gilks, Jamie Wright, Claire Mills, Jean Belt, Sue Lewis, James Holden, Brian Evans, Marion Coupe

Apologies: Terry Bracher, Arlene Bishop, Dr Jane Howells, Wendy Lawrence, Ruth Butler, Lucy Lewis, Naomi Oakley, John Chandler, Sam Hicks

A thank you for coming and to David Dawson, Wiltshire Museum for hosting with the preferred Zoom platform.

1. Actions from previous meeting
 - a. Feed back on how many speakers we want on conference. No one has got back to Julie yet so this will come up in this agenda item
 - b. Chippenham VCH celebration project – Sam Hicks had contacted Julie as she has an interest in Chippenham so that will be followed up.
 - c. Terry was going to talk to Rhys Schell from Wilts Council about area board funding, we don't know if he has done this yet – Julie will chase. Important for them to understand the importance of local history and its benefit on local communities.
2. Update from Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre:

Choosing History event in Swindon, 8th February 2025

Ally updated the group on an event she and Ruth Butler attended at Swindon Central Library the previous Saturday. It was a well attended event aimed at young people with possible interest in history.

SEND event in Trowbridge, 7th February 2025

Julie reported on this event which she attended with Ian. The focus of this was to tell people more about the accessibility work being done at the History Centre. There was a good response with people deliberately targeting the stand due to their interest in history.

May 2025 conference

May 2025 conference update – almost ready to get promotion out, would like to do this before the end of February ready for 10th May. At the moment we have Todd Gray, keynote speaker “Searching for garden history” – hopefully a session that people can use for their own research; Rosemary Pemberton talking about a lost early 19th century Salisbury garden; and Tim Couzens talking about the gardens at Draycot. Julie has put together a plan for 9:45 registration and welcome; 4:30 close including discussion time at the end. Venue is Kennet Valley Village Hall. Julie likes the idea of the discussion panel at the end – it worked really well in 2022. Either we could have a fourth speaker or increase the discussion. Please get back to Julie if you have any ideas on who else to ask.

Discussions were had on potential fourth speakers – maybe someone from the National Trust or somewhere similar? A volunteer at one of the NT houses? It was felt that a talk about somewhere like Stourhead would be really popular.

Action: Julie to email Claire and Tina to follow up, and a suggestion of Julia Mottershaw

There was also discussion on what to call the event – is it a study day? It was agreed that conference or symposium sounded too official and formal. Study Day sounded right.

Sue asked what the ticket price would be, and there followed discussions on how it worked in previous years with money left over from the old Forum meetings. Julie was unsure about how much of the old WLHF money was left and would check with Terry. It was important that this money be made use of as this was a stipulation when the WLHF folded. If there was money left it would be good if we could keep the format the same as last time and make attendance free, with donations welcome.

Action: Julie to find out about the remaining WLHF funds

3. Update on the VCH local history workshops held at WSHC (Ally or via report)
 - a. Ally reported that the VCH workshops were going well and had had over 80 separate attendees (not all at each session) so had reached a good number. Ally can provide final numbers at the next meeting. James asked if they would be run again next year; this is a conversation Ally has to have with John Chandler once this run has finished.
4. New local history hub at Box Library (launched with a series of talks and displays) - Claire Mills
 - a. Claire is a local historian based in Box and they have had a website called Box People and Places started by Alan and Carol Payne. Have always had ad hoc talks at Box Library – the library has given them part of the library to have an exhibition and talks (on a Thursday morning) to support the exhibition – already have local history books but other bound printed copies of histories of Box have been added. Alan has transcribed all the burial records for Box Cemetery as well. Exhibitions each quarter – general history was the first one, next one is roads, later will be trains which will include a talk and walk. Then rivers festival linked to the Avon. After summer there will one on metal detecting – a metal detector has found some amazing finds at Hazlebury and will do an exhibition and talks. Really excited that Box Library is allowing them to do things there. Everything is free but you need to book for the talks as the library is small. First talk had 40 people! Julie – we can share stuff about that on social media, just let us know. Julie asked about the publications and if they'll be in the main library? Claire – there are printed copies of things from the website. Julie is happy to have items to be added to the library catalogue which can be borrowed. Julie will talk to the library staff about this.

Action: Julie to liaise with Box/Corsham library staff about acquiring publications

- b. Sue – hasn't seen anything on social media about what's going on – Julie said it's not really ready and up yet. Libraries need to do their bit to promote.

Action: Julie to send update to Naomi to promote in March.

- 5. Adding members interests to the list of WLHN members – Naomi
 - a. Please let us know if you would like to be added to the research interest area on the website. Action all who are interested. Even if you don't want to share on the website it would still be lovely to hear from you so that we might be able to contact you if we think someone else is interested.
 - b. David Gilks – would be very interested in knowing what other people are doing.

Action: Group members to email Naomi with details of their area(s) of interest if they are happy to do so.

- 6. Group information share – a chance for members to discuss their work or ask questions

Details emailed by Jane Howells:

The West of England & South Wales Women's History Network conference will be in October, hope in Exeter, and on subject of 'Women and Food: historical perspectives'. I'll send further details as soon as I have them

Easton Royal Heritage Group:

19th February Graham Bathe will be giving his talk about Tottenham House. Naomi to send out a poster with the minutes.

Julie Davis:

Introduced herself and talked about the work she is doing – project work and ongoing work with community groups. Really keen on accessibility – physical and remote. Trying to set up a working group so if anyone is interested in joining this please let Julie know. Naomi will send out details.

James Holden:

Update on VCH – 3 of the Wiltshire volumes are in progress. Volume 20 is Chippenham and there will be a celebration event. Currently with Institute for Historical Research and under review to be sent back with any corrections or additions, then it will be about a year for the publishers to prepare it. Looking at September/October next year. Planning to invite the Queen! Other two volumes are south east of Salisbury (volume 21). Look at Wiltshirehistory.org and there is already information about some parishes online there. Mary Siraut – editor for Somerset will take on sub editor for volume 21. Volume 19 south west area is progressing. Possibly a year behind volume 20. Publication for that in 2027.

Sue:

Programme co-ordinator for Warminster U3A local history. 34 members now coming to meetings even though only started in September.

David Gilks:

Corsham, interested in Anglo Saxon history, doing more research locally on the Anglo Saxon period. Not linked to any group so interested to hear if anyone is interested in the same time period.

Jean Belt:

Report from Purton Historical Society

- 1 The 2025 programme started with a New Year Social attracting over 50 members and friends. We enjoyed a quiz and buffet supper before being entertained by "Village Voices", a local choir.
- 2 On 23rd January Nick Baxter's subject was "Wiltshire during the Viking Menace".
- 3 This month, on 27th February, Michael Woodward, Captain of the Tower, and Katy Whitaker, another ringer who is also our resident archaeologist, discuss the history of the bells of St Mary's Church, especially during the last hundred years.
- 4 The AGM is on 27th March after which three or four members will give ten minutes talks.
- 5 The Museum reopens on Saturday 5th April. The special exhibition for this year is "Purton in Photographs".
- 6 The annual subscription remains at £18. We welcome visitors who pay £3 per meeting.
- 7 The New Year raffle raised £250 so, with generous donations from the Parish Council, several local companies and individuals, we have reached the sum required to fund the publication of "Records and Recollections of Purton and District", written by Alec Robbins in 1994, and updated by PHS members.
- 8 "The Romans in Purton" project will continue in the spring. Twenty pits have been dug in people's gardens and pieces of mosaic, roof tiles, a coin and pottery have been found, suggesting there could have been a substantial Roman building in the Pavenhill area. Other parts of the village are also being investigated.

John Chandler:

Wiltshire Record Society: The new volume (77 for 2024) is *Salisbury Domesday Books* part 2 (1413-1478), and will be distributed to members later this month

Hobnob Press: Before he died Ken Rogers, assisted by his son Edward, completed his last book, *Wiltshire and Somerset Weavers*, a companion to his classic *Wiltshire and Somerset Woollen Mills*. Hobnob will be publishing it within the next few weeks. We are also working on a revision of Pam Slocombe's *Wiltshire Farm Buildings* for the WBR (and several non-Wiltshire titles).

VCH Wilts: The draft text of Alderbury, by Mark Forrest and Louise Ryland-Epton, has recently been posted online at the VCH/IHR website. Clarendon Park, Whiteparish and Landford, by Rosalind Johnson, are also all now online as well. We are awaiting the external reviewer's report on our Chippenham volume, and are preparing the maps and illustrations.

Sam Hicks:

From the Pewsey Valley Local History Research Group:

In order to honour the extraordinary community of Pewsey some group members have recently started in-depth research of family surnames most regularly found from the earliest records to the mid 19th century in Pewsey Parish. This is an evolving project which we expect to result in a published volume. We are in the very earliest stages and will report more fulsomely at the next meeting, in the meantime we would like to express our particular thanks to Julie Davis, Louise Ryland-Epton, John Chandler and Tina Richards who have immediately engaged and offered support which has been so encouraging. Samantha Hicks is the main point of contact for the project at sea.hicks@gmail.com

Wendy Lawrence:

The PVLHRG will be presenting their Spring talk on 26th March when Grace Awdry will be speaking about the Blacknall Field Anglo Saxon cemetery. A poster will be circulated.

Event of interest:

The Innocent A musical interpretation of the life and untimely death of Thomas Helliker — The Trowbridge Martyr Words by Mick Ryan, music by Mick Ryan and Steven Faux Tickets £10.00 Saturday 22 March 2025 7.30pm The Cause, 42 The Causeway Chippenham, SN15 3DD:

The Innocent, a story told in words and song to celebrate the short life of Thomas Helliker known as the Trowbridge Martyr who was hanged on his 19th birthday 22 March 1803. Local workers in Trowbridge feared the introduction of mechanical shearing frames to finish the cloth. The Shearmen's Union whose motto was 'Industry, Freedom and Friendship' stood to lose the most from the introduction of machinery. They were well organised in the North of England and the West-Country in fighting mechanisation. When shearing frames were introduced at Littleton Mill it was burned almost to the ground on 22 July 1802. It is likely that Thomas had been framed by powerful clothiers determined to make an example. He was apprehended on false accusation despite having an alibi and protesting his innocence. Although he probably knew those who had set the fire, he steadfastly refused to name them.

["The Innocent" - a story told in song by Mick Ryan and Steven Faux. Tickets, Sat 22 Mar 2025 at 19:30 | Eventbrite](#)

7. Suggested date of next meeting

4 June 2025