



Wiltshire Local History Network

Meeting
Wednesday 16 October 2024, 7.30pm
Online via Zoom

Minutes

Present: Julie Davis (Chair), Naomi Oakley (WSHC), Ally McConnell (WSHC), Tina Richards, Sue Lewis, Jean Belt and Lucy, Michelle, Christine Cox, Tim Couzens, Gillian Swanton, Anne Goodyear, Terry Bracher (WSHC), Peter Roberts

Apologies: Liz Johnson, James Holden, John Chandler, Brian Edwards, Jane Howells, Ruth Newman

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

1. Actions from previous meeting

To let Julie know preferences for conference speaker: the only expressed preference was for Todd Gray

Julie was to make arrangements with the chosen keynote speaker (see item 2)

Local History Month: Christina let Julie know that she will introduce herself to Local Studies Champion for Malmesbury

Julie reiterated that the offer is always open to share what groups are working on in libraries during Local History Month

2. WLHN Conference

The conference date has been arranged for Saturday 10 May to be held at Kennet Valley Village Hall at Lockeridge. The theme is garden history and Todd Gray booked as keynote. He is from Exeter University and has researched Devon garden history, publishing "The Garden History of Devon is a reference guide to historical sources" so his talk may be beneficial in learning how to research yourself.

The next step is work out who the speakers who will be. There were two additional speakers at last year's conference. Would we want two or perhaps three for 2025? We may extend the day slightly to accommodate three speakers so the day is not too rushed and there is plenty of time for breaks. It was agreed with worked well having a panel of all speakers at the end

for questions which could be done with two speakers. Julie feels she will be able to get the additional speakers we will need.

Action all to feedback to Julie about number of speakers

3. Update from Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre:

Maud Heath Study day feedback:

The recent study day at WSHC on medieval women's history "Maud Heath and Beyond: Exploring the Lives of Women Before 1600" run as part of the 550 anniversary project celebrations.

Many speakers with the keynote at the end, but was amusing and worked well. Didn't get that many people coming, especially considering it was free. 38 people booked, 26 attended which was a shame. Julie wasn't sure why; was it the way it was advertised, or even just the fact that the weather in the morning wasn't good.

Sounds of the South West forthcoming project:

Ally provided a summary of the project and promised to send further detail as below:

This is a National Lottery Heritage Funded project that has received funding for its developmental stage.

Sounds of the South West will preserve and create access to the region's audio archives - some of our most at-risk heritage. The recordings we will digitise are unique and very vulnerable.

This project will digitally preserve important recordings from the 1940s to the early 21st century held by archives, museums and heritage centres across south west England. It will focus on collections most urgently needing protection against permanent loss and those that will resonate with people, including underrepresented communities.

We are rapidly losing our audio heritage due to format degradation and machine obsolescence, eg old tape reels and players. Professional consensus is that many sound collections will become unplayable in the next 12 years. Without this project important archival heritage will be lost. Digitising these recordings now will open up rich stories, enabling people to hear authentic voices of generations of local people.

Through this project 22 repositories will come together to address the need, developing collaborative working. Bristol City Council will act as lead organisation, working closely with colleagues from Archives South West (representing the nine local authority archive services) and a network of other repositories.

Repositories involved:

- Bath & North East Somerset Council (Bath Archives)
- Bristol City Council (Bristol Archives and Bristol Libraries)
- Cheltenham College (Cheltenham College Archives)
- Cornwall Council (Kresen Kernow)
- Dorset Council (Dorset History Centre)
- Gloucester City Council (Museum of Gloucester)

- Gloucestershire County Council (Gloucestershire Archives)
- Halsway Manor Society (Halsway Manor, National Centre for Folk Arts)
- Jersey Heritage Trust (Jersey Heritage)
- North Somerset Council (North Somerset Studies Library)
- PK Porthcurno
- Plymouth City Council (The Box, Plymouth)
- Science Museum Swindon
- South West Heritage Trust (Devon and Somerset Archives & Local Studies)
- Stroudwater Textile Trust
- Stroud District Council and the Cowle Trust (Museum in the Park)
- Wellington & District Oral History Group
- Wiltshire Council (Wiltshire and Swindon Archives & Local Studies)
- Winchcombe Museum
- Winscombe and Sandford Local History & Archaeology Society
- World Wildlife Trust (Slimbridge Wetland Centre)
- University of Bristol (Special Collections and Theatre Collections)

We currently have access to the equipment in the audio digitisation suite at Bristol Archives. The equipment is the property of The British Library and remains at Bristol Archives on the understanding that it will be used to support further essential audio rescue.

A key ambition is embedding skills for work with audio. We will offer training to staff, covering specialist cataloguing, data protection and rights clearance (a potential income stream), sharing archival audio, and community engagement. Embedding this learning will lead to greater organisational resilience. We will also offer 6 early career apprenticeships (one per historic county) to provide training, skills and resilience to our sector.

Staff training sessions on digitisation and rights clearance to be held for WSHC staff by the end of the year... moving forwards will be recruiting an Apprentice and volunteers to help on the project

Wiltshire's first audio currently being digitised is:

Ref. 4350: A miscellaneous collection of assorted reel-to-reel and compact cassette tapes, totalling 96, though predominantly compact cassette tapes. The content is all relating to Wiltshire in some way. There is a mix of oral histories, lectures, interviews, radio broadcasts, and music. The information contained varies from personal experiences, interviews, talks, and performances. There are two notable large sets of oral history interviews; one called 'Trowbridge Voices' recorded in 1999, and another with people from Salisbury recorded between 1978-1980.

Ref. 3071/50/3BW: Part of the Wiltshire Folk Life Society collection; a set of 55 cassette tapes of oral history interviews.

Through the project, WSHC will be running 5 sessions with a group who will be working with a creative practitioner, using the newly digitised audio as inspiration.

If you want to know more then contact Ally or Julie. Allymcconnell@wiltshire.gov.uk and Julie.davis@wiltshire.gov.uk

Tim shared a link to Leeds Archive of Vernacular Culture which includes some Wiltshire material: <https://library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections/collection/2571#:~:text=Together%20they%20represent%20a%20record,ancestors%20lived%2C%20worked%20and%20spoke.>

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

Group share:

VCH update sent in advance, James Holden:

The main VCH news is that John Chandler is now in the final stages of editing Volume 20, for Chippenham area, and we anticipate sending it as a final draft to the Institute of Historical Research in the next few weeks. They will review it themselves, have external reviewers look at it then prepare it for publication; we in the meantime will be preparing all the illustrations. These late stages take a long time so we anticipate publication to be not before the summer of 2026, but we are already planning, in partnership with Chippenham museum and we hope WSHC, a major launch event which will be part of a series of community-based activities - it should be exciting when we get there!

Volume 19 (Mere area) is also close to completion though will probably follow this one to publication about a year afterwards. We are well on with Volume 21 (SE Wilts): Louise and Mark have almost finished Alderbury and Whaddon (Whiteparish, Landford and Clarendon Park are all complete or virtually so) and will be starting on the Grimsteads later this autumn.

The local history workshops have now begun and can be booked individually (details here <https://wshc.org.uk/events/>) and most people are by now aware of the exciting new findings about Maud Heath and her status.

Julie noted that Mel at Chippenham Museum is keen on making the most of VCH Chippenham volume launch when it happens and is interested in working on a community co-production bases approach, which Julie liked the sound of. If anyone in the north of the county would like to be involved in that project, then let Julie know.

Action: If anyone is interested in getting involved with Chippenham's celebration of the launch of the VCH please contact Julie.

Gillian Swanton:

The Wiltshire Geology Group recently unveiled a plaque in Norton Bavant churchyard dedicated to Etheldred Bennet, the first lady English Geologist, born near Tisbury, and who lived at Norton Bavant. She was the first geologist anywhere in world to draw a proper section of what she was studying, but her achievements not acknowledged. She worked at Chisgrove quarry. There is a PDF leaflet which Gillian will send. She is just one Wiltshire woman doing great things and who should have been more famous than she was.

Gillian has shared the blog which details the event:

<https://geologywestcountry.blogspot.com/2024/10/etheldred-bennett-memorialised.html>

Tina Richards:

The upcoming book Eminent Tisburgers is coming out on 23rd November. The launch at will be at Hinton Hall with free refreshments. One of those who has been written about is Etheldred Bennett – her fossils are in Philadelphia, with a few at Leeds. The book is about people who have lived in Tisbury and, at some stage, had a national profile (examples include regicide John Bradshaw (who was given Fonthill estate and was the first signatory of death warrant of Charles I), Bletchley women, Lord Brook of Sutton Mandeville (architect of

National Lottery and secretary for Northern Ireland), Jeremy Phipps who helped plan rescue of Iranian embassy hostages, Martin Fleishman was involved in cold fusion research, and Eric Shipton, mountaineer. There are 39 pieces written by 20 members of the community. It will be coming out in hardback, and they have found a good layout artist (previously with Penguin Randomhouse) and given time for free. They have been running lectures as usual and would like a few more younger people on the committee and was wondering how to encourage that.

Julie asked if Tina thinks Tisbury is particularly unique in terms of its interesting inhabitants, but Tina thinks not! She is sure most places could produce a book like this (covers 500 years). She contacted people who she thought would be interested and might like to write. Two grants were given to completed the project including the Chalke Valley History Trust (although a bid to the SW Wilts Area Board was turned down despite the focus on community and involving older people).

Julie added that it can be worthwhile to speak to community connectors if want to liaise with Area Boards. Karen Linaker is the SEPM who covers SW Wiltshire Area Board and Tina did have some useful help from her. Other societies mentioned similar problems; Terry will talk to the Communities team to see if he can find out more and get to the bottom of things.

Action: Terry to talk to Rhys Shell, Head of the Communities team about barriers to accessing Area Board capital funding for local history projects

Jean and Lucy, Purton Historical Society:

1. The PHS has a new secretary, a volunteer, Mark White.
2. In September a group visited the Richard Jefferies Museum at Coate. It poured with rain the entire time so we gave the gardens a miss.
3. Purton Museum had to close for 6 weeks in August and September for extensive repairs to the windows, but since then visitor numbers to the 'Purton in the 1980s' exhibition have increased.
4. In September, David Mitchell's talk on 'The North Wessex Way' attracted 47 members and friends, the best attendance for several years. This is the link to David's website. <https://northwessexway.co.uk/>. It was an excellent talk.
5. 16 pits have been dug in connection with the 'Romans in Purton' project. 30 local residents have volunteered so other plots will be investigated next year.
6. 'The History of the Nationwide Building Society' is the subject for 24th October, to be followed by Steve Bacon talking about 'Wilts & Berks and North Wilts Canals' on 28th November. They are being restored as far as Cricklade, Abingdon and Melksham.
7. The New Year Social is on 10th January.
8. We intend to arrange a visit to the newly opened Science and Innovation Park at Wroughton in the spring.

Julie enquired how easy it was to get speakers. Jean said it was quite easy, various people look out in all sorts of directions finding speakers in other groups for example, they are on the lookout all the time particularly for people speaking on local subjects.

Jean also shared that they were told a project to update Records and Recollections of Purton and District would not be covered by their policies.

Jean also followed up with Tina's comment about attracting younger people to the group and committees and was pleased they now have two younger people on committee. Lucy is the group archivist, and her sister is on committee too. It can be done!

Tim Couzens:

To update on the progress of the next Wiltshire Record Society volume which will be Tim's, volume 77 on the Letters of Lady Dorothy Long of Draycott House. There are 660 letters covering a vast breadth of subject matter from the mundane to estate matters and affairs of state, the death bed of Charles II, and gossip from London and MPs, covering the period 1660-1710. It is focusing on the female voice with letters written to granddaughters, great nieces etc forming a subset of the total 1280 letters. It may be published towards the end of 2024 or early 2025.

Julie will be interested to see it, she asked if Tim was able to get a sense of Lady Dorothy's character and Tim noted that she certainly seemed quite a character, not one to argue with! The Long family men tended to drink and create financial problems, and Dorothy was able to steady the ship. Tim noted that it was good to be able to focus on women's history as women continue to remain underrepresented in history.

Anne Goodyear, Malmesbury History Society:

Christina has now contacted the Local History Champion at Malmesbury Library and the History Society have volunteered to help with a display for Local History Month in 2025 with a display on Hannah Twinnoy, a local woman who was killed by a tiger.

There are still a few outreach activities going on despite being in recovery from the Athelstan 1100 celebrations. There is a focus now on archiving the exhibitions that took place.

The History Society have had some interesting talks, the next being Dr Cathryn Spence. Cathryn will tell us how, 250 years ago this year, Joseph Priestley 'discovered' oxygen at Bowood House near Calne.

The Wessex Week festival on 19th Oct to 26th Oct with many events now sold out but tickets for some are still available. [Home - Wessex Week](#)

Tim Couzens noted that the restoration of Hannah Twynnoy's headstone made the national press and it looks marvellous now.

Peter Roberts, Redlynch and District Local History Society:

The society have a good range of speakers for the winter and the committee is starting to scan our archive with a view to putting some of our records on a website.

Peter is working on a talk which is a social history of the local Green close to his home. The intent is to look at the 100 years since the village and manor of Hale (Hampshire) was sold in 1920. He has been asking the owners of the 30 or so properties for a look at their deeds and any information they have on past occupiers. The response has been very good with more information than can be used in a one hour talk. He will probably consider writing it all up and producing a small booklet. The talk is all based on local information rather than using a library or the Record Office, very much a local social history (the oldest interviewee is 87)

Sue Lewis, Warminster U3a Local History Group:

Representing a new group within the Warminster U3a, they held a first interest meeting in August and then first meeting proper in September. They took the Warminster blue plaque trail and asked everyone to bring a little information to encourage people to go and research, use the Record Office and the Museum. The first speaker was Eric Peddle from Warminster Museum, and it went down very well. The programme of talks is now arranged until April 2025. Members will contribute for every 3rd meeting to encourage research work with a 20 minute presentation on a particular topic. The initial group of 16 is now up to 33 members.

Sonia is the group leader but is not experienced using Zoom, she may be able to attend future meetings.

Julie is delighted that there is so much positive news on the amount of work going on!

Terry Bracher:

CILIP: Will be soon asking for submissions for the Alan Ball Award for 2024 which is run by the CILIP Local Studies group on behalf of the Library Services Trust. There are awards for hard copy and for e-publication such as websites and blogs as well as community publications (hard copy or electronic). If anything is due to be published in November then it could be sneaked in for this year's award. Entries are accepted from everywhere, but Wiltshire has always done well. John Chandler and Terry are both judges but will have to withdraw to judge Wiltshire entries. A link to watch the online award ceremony will be shared.

More information is available including how to nominate a publication via this link [Alan Ball Awards 2024 – CILIP Local Studies Group](#)

5. Suggested date of next meeting

Wednesday 15th January 2025