



Wiltshire Local History Network

Meeting
Wednesday 22 July 2025, 7.30pm
Online via Zoom

Minutes

Present: Julie Davis (Chair), Naomi Oakley (WSHC), Ally McConnell (will be arriving late), Stuart Raymond, Sue Lewis, Peter Roberts, Lucy Lewis, Jean Belt, Anne Goodyear, Stephen Smith, John Chandler, Brian, Nick Baxter, Arlene Bishop

Apologies: James Holden, Andrew Robson, Ruth Newman, Dr Jane Howells, David Gilks, Marion Coupe

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

1. Actions from previous meeting

Action all: please think about any themes or speaker suggestions and feedback any suggestions so Julie can discuss with John. If you would like to volunteer to be involved with the organising of the day, please get in touch. Julie.davis@wiltshire.gov.uk

Meeting was held and agreed it was a good plan to combine WLHN Study Day with Wiltshire Record Society AGM. WRS do not hold study days – a topic has been agreed.

2. Update from Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre:

NLHF Grounds for Appeal: First World War Military Service Appeal Tribunals in Great Britain (Naomi)

WSHC have been awarded funding by the National Lottery Heritage Fund to lead a project working with records of First World War military service tribunals. It will be running until January 2028 and there are 14 other archive services taking part from across England and Wales. The principal aim is to create a national database of data extracted from these records to be able to tell both a national and regional story. There will also be a variety of events happening at all the archives and learning resources being created.

A little background context to the tribunals: in January 1916 the Military Service Act was passed enforcing compulsory military service for the first time. Over 2000 local appeal tribunals were set up to review cases of men who appealed for exemption on particular grounds which included occupation, serious hardship to family or business, ill health or grounds of conscience (which only totalled around 2-3% of applications).

These records can provide a valuable insight into the social and economic history of Britain during wartime and include a really diverse range of voices. We are lucky to have any papers as in 1921 the Government issued an instruction to destroy the Tribunal records, with only two official sets ordered to be retained. Luckily, many do survive at local level, having been saved by good judgement or by luck. Ivor Slocombe noted that the papers for Calne Rural District Council survive because they never threw anything away!

I will be recruiting volunteers to get involved in the project in different ways including extracting data from the applications to the tribunals, researching stories of the men, their families, local areas, and the tribunal panels using records both at the history centre and online. The main volunteer work won't get going until mid-late March as we need to wait for a project officer to be in post. I will be putting a call out for volunteers soon but if you would like to express interest in being involved get in touch with me.

naomi.oakley@wiltshire.gov.uk

Arlene noted: I have a few newspaper clips relating to Little Somerford men who went before the tribunal, generally farm workers.

Amy Jeffs event – April 1st

We will be hosting an 'in conversation' event with Amy Jeffs on Wednesday 1st April at 7.30pm. Amy Jeffs is an author, artist and medievalist with bestselling publications including *Storyland: A New Mythology of Britain*; *Wild: Tales from Early Medieval Britain*; *Saints*; and most recently *Old Songs* (on traditional ballads). We are partnering with the Corsham Bookshop who will be selling Amy's books on the night, and Amy will be doing a book signing after the event. I will be starting publicity soon, but if you would like to reserve a place in advance then please email Naomi. Tickets will be £10. I've heard Amy speak before and she is a fantastic so it should be an interesting one. Naomi.oakley@wiltshire.gov.uk

Possibility of joint WLHN/Wiltshire Record Society Study Day (Julie)

Date: 16th May Saturday

No topics suggested so it was decided the theme will be unusual aspects of buildings. John Chandler had some ideas for keynote speakers. Julie wondered if WLHN members James Holden and Jamie Wright (worked on Fisherton bricks) might be interested in contributing talks.

Julie has investigated a venue. Bromham now has a new venue but the smaller of the two halls seats 50 and may be tight. You can hire both halls but that looked too expensive. 16th May is currently free.

Easterton Village Hall is also free for the date and the cost was similar to the single hall at Bromham. The distance to Easterton was considered to be a reasonable compromise for north and south, being about 20 minutes from Devizes. It has parking and a kitchen and was

agreed to be a good option. Julie will go ahead and book. [Home | Easterton Village Hall](#)

Action Julie to book Easterton Village Hall

Action all: if anyone would like to offer a talk that fits with the topic let Julie know

julie.davis@wiltshire.gov.uk

Question was asked whether it would have the same timings as before? Julie confirmed that WRS will decide on the programme.

As Terry was no longer available to assist Julie on the day, Julie asked if any WLHN members would be able to help with the refreshments on the day. Sue Lewis kindly agreed to help Julie on the day as Terry no longer available and Naomi is on leave (mid-May birthday!). If anyone else would like to assist with the refreshments, please contact Julie as more than one person will be needed.

Action: contact Julie if you can help with the Study Day refreshments –

julie.davis@wiltshire.gov.uk

Living Heritage UK project (Julie)

[Welcome | Inventories of Living Heritage in the UK](#)

Julie shared UNESCO Inventories of Living Heritage in the UK.

They are looking for details of cultural activities still being practiced (e.g. oak apple day, mumming groups, beating the bounds etc). If anyone knows of anything then take a look at the site linked above. (It may be a bit involved)

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

Rosie Upton (sent via email) – Thomas Helliker Tomb Restoration

White Horse (Wiltshire) Trades Union Council is seeking financial donations to restore Thomas Helliker's tomb in St James Church Yard, Trowbridge. The lettering on the tomb on both faces of the white marble tablets is damaged and becoming illegible.

Thank you to all of you who have already made a donation.

We would be pleased if you could forward this email to anyone else you think may be interested.

It is not only one of the most important monuments not just in the town but for trades unionists everywhere. It is a memorial to a principled young man sometimes known as the Trowbridge Martyr who refused to testify against others and was hanged on his 19th birthday for allegedly burning down Littleton Mill when machinery was introduced that would have taken away their jobs.

We are aiming to raise the sum of £2,000. Any funds raised will be ring fenced for the restoration of the Grade II Listed box tomb.

The Crowdfunder page is still live and the time for making a donation has been extended until the 22 February. The website for the Crowdfunder is

<https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/helliker-tomb-restoration-appeal>

Sue Lewis, Warminster U3A

Programme planning going well and members happy. Getting around 25-30 attendance and all seem actively engaged.

John Chandler

WRS

Received first proof copy of next WRS volume which will be distributed soon. It is by Stuart Raymond and titled The Holford Family Papers 1695-1798. It is a substantial book and formed the research basis for the social history of Avebury published c18 months ago by Hobnob Press. It is a detailed book covering estate management, farm accounts, and social history of Avebury. An essential companion to Stuart's social history of Avebury.

VCH

Our Chippenham – year of celebration. The next VCH volume covering Chippenham and surrounding villages will be published later in the year. It has been typeset and John will get the proofs at the beginning of February, before indexing. Progress also being made on volume 19 (Mere and Deverills) which is mostly researched and written but still requires editing work. Volume 21 covering South-East Wiltshire also in progress (Aldbury and Clarendon are finished, Grimstead and West Dean are mostly finished, now researching Pitton & Farley). The second part of the Chippenham celebrations in 2026 focus on the 400th anniversary of John Aubrey's birth on 12 March 1626. There will be a birthday party held at Chippenham Museum, a volume of facsimile of a work he wrote and illustrated but never published produced which will launch on 12th March. John also writing a short history of Chippenham drawn from the VCH research which will also be on sale on 12th March.

HobNob

The Aubrey facsimile and history of Chippenham are both upcoming Hobnob books. Before Christmas published a detailed volume looking at Compton Chamberlayne families written by a member of one of the families, Elise Langdon-Neuner which has been selling well.

Jean Belt – Purton Historical Society

The autumn talks were well supported. In October Keith Allsop's subject was "The Agricultural History of Purton Part 1, from the Ice Age to 1066." Visitors included some local farmers sharing information about their land.

Over 50 members and friends attended the November talk given by Chris Pocock who described the Lydiard Park Estate, illustrated with documents and photographs from the 1943 sale.

The New Year began with our annual Social evening when entertainment was provided by the Fourtune Saxophone Quartet.

Tomorrow Nick Baxter will speak about "Swindon's Other Railway, the story of the Midland and South Western Junction Railway" which ran through Blunsdon.

In March the AGM will be followed by three ten minute talks given by PHS members. The Museum reopens on Tuesday 7th April, from 3.00pm until 5.30pm. This is a new arrangement. In addition to Tuesday afternoons, it will open on the last Saturday of each month, from 10.00am until 12.30pm. The new exhibition for 2026 is "Purton on a Plate". A Roman box flue tile has been given to the Museum. It was found in the Restrop Road allotments more than 20 years ago. It still has traces of cement in the grooves.

Some interesting observations were made during the September walk, when members were looking at WW2 remains. There is a "No Entry" sign in German on the office door at the ambulance depot in Lydiard Millicent, indicating that German POWs must have worked there. Metal detectors have found two American one cent coins dated 1943 at Bagbury Farm. It is possible that Americans from the Hospital in Lydiard Park bought supplies from local farms which employed Italian POWs. This strange mixture of nationalities in our area were fighting each other on the other side of the Channel at the time.

Anne Goodyear – Malmesbury History Society

Malmesbury Museum exhibition – Malmesbury in World War Two is on until the end of March.

The society have started the next season of talks, and John Chandler is coming to talk about Maud Heath at the AGM.

Sought advice on research on buildings in Malmesbury. There is a stone column with a capital at the top but not sure how to stylistically date it. Julie suggested the Wiltshire Buildings Record. Dorothy Treasure is an architectural historian:

wiltshirebuildingsrecord.org.uk

Dorothy.treasure@wiltshire.gov.uk

Peter Roberts – Redlynch and District History Society

Purton's 10-minute talk idea is a good one and has been successful for Redlynch and District HS with a whole evening with 5-6 speakers with 10 minutes at a time; this year one of the former 10-minutes speakers gave a full lecture.

Peter noted they were lucky to have one of the VCH researchers living close by to give talks. Rosalind Johnson gave another talk, this time on lost houses of Whiteparish.

Stuart Raymond

Launch of WRS book Holford Papers of Avebury as mentioned by John Chandler.

He has also just published a second edition of *Words from Wills and other probate records: a glossary*. The original edition was published 20 years ago and has been updated with more words found through WRS publications of probate records. Published by British Association of Local History.

Please let Stuart know about any newly published books for review in the Wiltshire archaeological and natural history magazine.

Stephen Smith

Nothing to report, enjoying the meetings.

Brian Edwards

North Wessex Downs National Landscapes are backing research into Wiltshire's white horses. Research is led by Gary Gibbons who completed a project on the Broad Town White horse, forthcoming. The current project is focusing on Pewsey and involves archive research as well as on site, a full community project.

It is the 40th anniversary of Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site – events between September and November.

In May will have 80th article, paper or chapter published. Upcoming publication is on early engagement with dowsing in Wiltshire. **Action: Brian to send to Julie.**

Arlene Bishop, Little Somerford History Book

A project to transcribe the earliest school log book is going well. Arlene gave a talk last year about Little Somerford school and people were particularly engaged with excerpts of log book. To capitalise on that enthusiasm Arlene set up this project to bring the logbook to life. There are 291 pages covering 1875-1894. At last count, 230 pages are completed or underway with a team of 19 transcribers (all new to transcription save two so Arlene produced a help sheet, sent a sample page with transcription to see the process, plus 5 pages of the logbook pages). She created an Excel log to know who had which pages, if they had been sent the help sheet, sent a photo of the teacher, when the transcription was sent back and when uploaded onto the master document. She provides the transcribers with little round-ups along the way so people can follow stories that they come across in their allocated pages. She was impressed by the number of people who came forward, some from Malmesbury and Great Somerford. A great project to get the community involved.

John asked if they have visited Sevington School – Arlene agrees this is a great idea.

Nick Baxter – Marlborough Local History Society

It is the 25th anniversary of the group (est. Sept 2001)

James Holden gave a talk about public buildings including Marlborough Town Hall.

Membership currently stands at 173. There is a good programme of speakers for this year and trips out arranged including one in April for Nick's work researching the Vicar's Library of St Mary's now held at the Bodleian Library to see some of the manuscripts.

Nick will also leading a walk around Bradford on Avon in May. Others including one from John Osborne (former Senior Master at Marlborough College) on historic Wiltshire churches.

Julie suggesting that members of the History Society should visit Marlborough library!

Arlene asked Nick about walk (Bradford) – he confirmed it is on May 19th £5 a head for non-members

John Chandler: on the subject of outings and visits... John ran mystery tours for Box Society (now folded) previous and recommended it as something Nick might think of doing. A coach takes the group to mystery location known only to the driver and tour lead. John now leads them for the Friends of Gloucestershire Archives to places which are not popular tourist locations, but interesting within 1-1.5 hours travel. The recent trips included Hungerford and they were also able to look at the mound at Marlborough College. Nick remembered a local history walk John led around Old Town in Swindon where he had his eyes opened to local history.

4. Suggested date of next meeting

15th April 2026, 7.30pm via Zoom