



Wiltshire Local History Network

Meeting
Wednesday 22 July 2025, 7.30pm
Online via Zoom

Minutes

Present: Julie Davis (Chair), Naomi Oakley (WSHC), Lucy Lewis, David Dawson, Sue Lewis, David Gilks, Peter Roberts, Andrew Robson, Tim Couzens, Michelle, Anne Goodyear, Stephen Smith, Terry Bracher, Arlene, Nick Baxter, Ruth Butler, Brian Evans, Stuart Raymond

Apologies: John Chandler, Dr Jane Howells, James Holden, Ruth Newman, Jean Belt, Marion Coupe, Ally McConnell

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

1. Actions from previous meeting

Julie was to contact Box and Corsham library staff to acquire new publications mentioned by Claire Mills.

Julie has made enquiries and is liaising with staff at Box and Corsham library.

Naomi was to add an area for members research interests to the WLHN website to facilitate knowledge sharing.

The [WLHN webpage](#) includes a list of members which includes any stated research interest alongside the archives@wiltshire.gov.uk contact address to use so we can forward any networking requests. Please email naomi.oakley@wiltshire.gov.uk if you would like to update information about your interests or expertise.

Action: Julie to liaise with John and investigate a possible study day with the British Association for Local History

John Chandler will be in touch with Julie shortly to discuss any plans, but has enquired about theme and date.

Julie agrees it would be great to go ahead with a conference for next year, but that organising and planning of the theme, speakers etc would need to be undertaken by other members of the Network. Julie will be happy to be in charge of the administrative support such as contacting speakers, payments etc.

A date of **Saturday 16th May** is proposed (and does not seem to coincide with national events/celebrations which might impact attendance)

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

2. Update from Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre:

Upcoming closure dates: there will be a long period of closure in December. The History Centre will be closed from Tuesday 9th December re-opening on Tuesday 30th December. This is to allow for a significant move of the staff office configuration which has been prompted by the new use of downstairs space for the Performing Arts library which was previously available for other service use.

Terry Bracher, Heritage Services Manager, is retiring at the end of October after 18 years in Wiltshire! Terry thanked everyone and expressed how much he had enjoyed and what a privilege it has felt working with local history groups. He also apologised to anyone who had contacted him in last eight months or more asking him to give a talk in 2026 and which he had to refuse knowing he would likely be retiring. Some of Terry's talks may be taken on by other colleagues. There are interim arrangements in place to cover Terry's role. Terry will continue to work with the CILIP Local Studies Group [CILIP Local Studies Group – News and events for local history libraries and archives](#) and the Alan Ball award. He will also continue research work into black history in Wiltshire.

Wiltshire Libraries is looking to host a series of talks including during Local History Month next May. If anyone would like to give talks (not only in May) then Julie can put you in touch with Jessica Phillips from the Wiltshire Libraries team.

3. Educafe, Julie Davis

The History Centre has successfully received funding from Chippenham Borough Lands Charity to run a pilot Educafe project. The Educafe started in West Berkshire at Newbury Library and provides a welcoming environment on particular day to encourage diverse communities to come and share and connect. Julie visited Newbury and commented that it had an amazing atmosphere. The Educafe model has proved popular, and the Berkshire team have received NLHF funding to help develop it in other counties. The History Centre were accepted, from a competitive field, to receive mentorship to open an Educafe. It will assist with ongoing work to improve accessibility and encourage people to feel the History Centre is a place for everyone. The History Centre will open on a Thursday as a community space. We hope it will work as successfully as Rooted Chippenham taking ownership of the garden space at the front and side of the building. The pilot project funded by Chippenham Borough Lands Charity will be opening in April to implement initial plans.

In response to Arlene's question about what activities are planned, Julie confirmed there will be an initial planning event for interested organisations - people already working with diverse communities – to help create a community-led process. The first project will be focus on migration stories – using items from collections on various themes (such as food), hoping that people will come and share their experiences and ideas, and learn more about Wiltshire's history (making use of and adding to our collections). Julie has reached out to other teams within the Council, such as the Asylum team, to help create spaces for different groups. Volunteers will be needed and will be able to help manage and shape what is done.

4. David Dawson, Wiltshire Museum

David provided an update on the Assize court project, beginning by thanking Terry for his help behind the scenes.

“Assizes for Devizes” project: the Wiltshire Museum opened in 1874 and is run by the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society. It holds nationally important archaeology collections.

The plan is to take over former Assize court in Devizes which has been empty since 1983 when it was sold by Wiltshire County Council. There has been a series of failed attempts to do anything with it, and it now stands derelict.

The building was built in 1835, designed by TH Wyatt (later president of the Royal Institute of British Architects).

It is a Grade II listed building and has been on the Heritage at Risk Register for 25 years. It was bought 2018 by Devizes Assize Court Trust and the Museum will have a 200 year lease at a peppercorn rent.

Substantial funding for the purchase of the building came from Robert Hunt-Grubbe who passed away recently.

Plans for the building have been drawn up thanks to funding from NLHF and other funders and now have planning permission. The plans were shared via PowerPoint.

There will be a learning area to facilitate larger school groups, a multi-use event space (seating 120 people in a theatre lecture style. The current Museum can only host 20). The ground floor will also contain a café and open space, and special exhibition gallery.

The first-floor displays will tell the chronological story of the county (pre-history to 1066) and visitors will then be guided downstairs to the Discover Devizes gallery to encourage people to learn about and explore the history of the town.

The story of the Assize court will also be told through the building, interpretation, and activities such as tours (to include cells!) The layout of court will be made clear on the floor and visitors will be able to read the room as the court. There will be some form of AV to tell the story and the Grand Jury box and Judges throne will be recreated through panelling.

The initial development phase has been completed and applications for funding for the delivery round submitted. The next steps will be design, construction, exhibition, and a soft opening 2030. The budget totals £15.1 million of which 92% is secured or in negotiation (including £8.4 million from NLHF to be confirmed in December)

£350 000 has been contributed by Wiltshire Council from the community infrastructure levy. They have also authorised an overdraft of £2 million. There is approximately £1.4 million left to raise.

The current [‘Downland’ exhibition](#) at the Museum is inspired by the archaeology and the archive collections and is well worth visiting.

Questions:

Objects in basement on show? There will be about 20% more display space than currently but the driver for the project is the iconic building, its more visible location, and the fact it will be a landmark in the town. Many of the objects in store are not necessarily of interest for public viewing. The move will allow for better organisation and more useable space.

Julie commented on the improvements for accessibility. The current Museum is spread over 25 floors.

Will there be a library area? There is no space for the collections in the new building as there are 1.4km of shelving currently. After opening at the Assize court, the collections from the current five buildings will be moved into four. This will release one building and also get

collections out from places where storage conditions are not optimal. With NLHF funding for a successor project, the current site will become a collections discovery centre with study area, including the library. More and better!

Terry thanked David for his effort in this project, knows how much work has gone into it.

Julie liked the idea of the Devizes room. A recent Memory Box group at History Centre touched on the history of Devizes industry and trades, and so much more could have explored with participants fascinated by the history of town.

All wished David good luck and success. David lastly highlighted that the Queen is now Royal patron.

5. Information share by participants

Lucy Lewis for Jean Belt, Purton Historical Society

On 15th August a group gathered at the War Memorial for a short service to mark the 80th anniversary of VJ Day. It was a sombre commemoration marking the end of WW2, arranged by the Royal British Legion and supported by the PHS.

The Museum has had a successful year. The exhibition “Purton in Photographs” has recalled many memories and characters for visitors. The Museum closes for the winter on 25th October. The annual walk, with some tricky stiles, covering almost 4 miles, was led by Keith Allsop on 6th September. 25 members and friends examined WW2 remains, including several pillboxes, the site of the Italian POW camp and what remains of the ambulance depot which has limited access as it is on private land and can only be seen with the owner’s permission.

The “Romans in Britain” project has finished. During the summer a few more pits were dug in various parts of the village but nothing of great significance was found. Roman pottery, pieces of roof tiles, some medieval pottery but the Saxons remain elusive. A full report on the findings will be available next year.

Graham Carter gave a talk on “The History of the Association of Wiltshire Men in London” to launch our autumn programme and tomorrow evening Keith’s subject is “The Fields of Purton, an agricultural history from the Ice Age to the Domesday Book (1086)”. In November Chris Pocock will show us photographs and documents from the 1943 sale of the Lydiard Park Estate. Hopefully our stall and display at St Mary’s Christmas Market will attract some new members. The web page has been viewed almost 1,000 times in the last year which is an encouraging improvement.

Finally, the Museum assisted an American visitor whose great great grandmother was born in Purton and emigrated to Canada in 1913 by arranging a meeting with two members of the same family, one lives in the village and the other brought a detailed family tree and photographs, to give the visitor information he was delighted to receive. The relatives will keep in touch.

Sue Lewis, Warminster U3a

Membership still increasing. Sue set a 30 miles radius of Warminster to focus activities of the group and is finding many people to give talks, walkabouts, visits and behind the scenes trips and programme is booked for next year.

Peter Roberts, Redlynch Local History Society

No big changes, still helping Downton History Group which has mostly folded. There is quite a lot of material in the Downton Local History Library in Downton itself. The group have also digitised a lot of material, now struggling to put together and make it accessible.

The Redlynch Local History Society have their own project to digitise material, and are about a third of the way through. The plan was originally to put it on a website but struggling to find people to do so and may look at alternatives.

Andrew Robson

A new member who attended a series of workshops on local history research at the History Centre run by VCH.

Tim Couzens

Continuing work with website currently shifting focusing from Draycot non-Wiltshire estates including Essex, Yorkshire, and Hampshire. Notes Draycot on the Athelstan Pilgrim Trail.

Michelle

Chair of Wiltshire Bridleways Association so attending through interest in rights of way and using the records office for research. Julie confirmed the History Centre will be happy to help and reflected on fascination of why and how rights of way have been lost, brought to greater prominence by the recent work that has aimed to map them online.

David Dawson, Wiltshire Museum

There are a couple of projects to research Wiltshire White Horses led by Gary Gibbons and Brian Edwards with North Wessex Downs National Landscape funding.

A conference on industrial archaeology Saturday 25th is sold out

There will be a conference on Archaeology in Wiltshire on 15th or 22nd March (to be confirmed) but most programme is organised.

The next VCH talk is bookable online: Shelburne and Sidmouth – Two Wiltshire Prime Ministers by Michael Hodges. [ONLINE TALK: Shelburne and Sidmouth - Two Wiltshire Prime Ministers - Wiltshire Museum](#)

Anne Goodyear, Malmesbury History Society

Half-way through Wessex Week sequence of talks which are going well with good attendance. The Athelstan Museum have launched 'Malmesbury in WWII' exhibition which is on until Spring next year. Another section of the Athelstan Pilgrim Way has opened a few months ago, with more parts completed. It's a new 100-mile walking and cycling route linking all 36 historic churches in North Wiltshire deanery. There is a passport to stamp at the different churches with information for children. It is proving popular. Maps can be found at

[Athelstan Pilgrim Way – 36 churches in North Wiltshire](#)
[Athelstan Pilgrim Way - British Pilgrimage Trust](#)

Stephen Smith

New member. Originally from Sutton Benger and now moved to Malmesbury. Here to find out what WLHN all about and meet like-minded people. He has previously undertaken research on Sutton Benger which informed [Benger Trails website](#). He is currently keen to engage with someone in Westbury or Dinton to share information on an interesting connection he has found between Sutton Benger and Westbury. Sue Lewis will get in touch. Stephen would be grateful for a contact with anybody who might know anything about the Ashe family of Westbury, and specifically about John Ashe of Heywood, Westbury, who died in the early 1700s. He would also be grateful for a contact with anybody who might know anything about the Ashe or Daniel (Daniell) families of Dinton and/or Teffont c. 1700. Please feel free to email naomi.oakley@wiltshire.gov.uk and I can put you in touch with Stephen.

Arlene, Little Somerford History Group

Thanked Peter for his tour at Redlynch which she thoroughly enjoyed and helped inform History Trail project for Little Somerford where work on some of the houses included has been completed.

Little Somerford also on the Pilgrim Trail.

Arlene recently gave a talk on the village school and the development of forms of education; it was first time presented a subject based talk. 30 people attended. There were printed old school photos, newspaper articles and snippets from log books for people to see. She is intending to launch a log book transcription project over the winter. Will consult with HC.

Nick Baxter

Next year will be 25th anniversary of the Marlborough History Society. Nick is the first chairman and the society now has more than 150 members.

He has taken on task of researching St Mary's Vicars Library, a collection given to vicars of Marlborough in 1678 which now contains over 800 manuscripts on permanent loan to the Bodleian. The collection had ended up in attic of town hall in 1943, saved by Edwin Kempson, Marlborough College and stored there until 1985. Some of the volumes date from late 15th century, with the majority 16th and 17th century. Nick's research is focusing on the Charles I's Eikon Basilike and John Foxe's Acts and Monuments (Book of Martyrs).

Nick is proud to see the current strength of the society having started the group 25 years ago. He no longer lives in Marlborough, living in Calne and gives talks all over the county.

Brian Evans

Last week attended the Wiltshire Buildings Record study day in Devizes. There were fascinating talks on Victorian Wiltshire from model farms in Wilton through to school buildings of Swindon. He recommends WBR to anyone interested in the physical fabric of county. He is currently researching Salisbury's role in usurpation of crown.

Stuart Raymond

Currently waiting for final proofs of Wiltshire Record Society volume on the Holford papers which should be out by the beginning of 2026. The Holford papers consist of letters and memoranda, accounts and journal of Sir Richard Holford, Lord of Manor of Avebury. The volume should be good bedside reading! The letters use some colourful language and include disputes between the rector and the Lord of Manor, and rector and publican. There are also descriptive letters of farming in Avebury in late 18th century.

John Chandler is currently typesetting that. He is also typesetting a second edition of *Words from Wills* (glossary of terms used in wills which BALH are re-publishing, and should also be out by beginning of next year)

Any books for review in the Wiltshire Archaeology Magazines can be sent to Stuart.

Ruth Butler, WSHC

The next edition of the Sarum Chronicle will be dedicated to Margaret Smith, a Blue Badge Guide for over 40 years who died a few weeks ago. Her funeral, held today, allowed many people to learn more about her. She was a founding member of Sarum Chronicle along with Ruth Newman, Jane Howells and John Chandler. She was the last still to sit on the editorial board. Her death came just as John was finishing the typesetting for this edition, a tribute was able to be added and the issue is dedicated to her. The Sarum Chronicle is an annual publication focusing on original historical research for Salisbury and south. Looking for articles for 2026. The next issue will launch on 13 November. To order a copy email sarumchronicle@gmail.com or visit [Sarum Chronicle | history of Salisbury and district](#)

Terry Bracher

For CILIP local studies group: once you have sent publication to WAM for review you should also submit for the Alan Ball Award for Local History publications. There are three categories for hard copy, e-publication, and for a community publication. Wiltshire has previously been well represented in prize – keep the Wiltshire flag flying! Contact Terry on chair.LSG@cilip.org.uk

6. Date of next meeting

Wednesday 21st January, 7.30pm via Zoom