



Wiltshire Local History Network

Meeting
Wednesday 11 January 2023, 7.30pm
Wiltshire Museum, Devizes

Minutes

Present: Julie Davis (Chair), Ally McConnell (WSHC), Naomi Sackett (WSHC), Ruth Butler (WSHC), David Dawson, Anne Trevett, Gillian Swanton, Brian Edwards, Jean Belt, Lucy Lewis, James Holden (VCH), Peter Roberts

Apologies: Nick Baxter, Julia Hunt, Stuart Raymond, Dr Jane Howells, Craig Gingell

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

1. Actions from previous meeting

Ancient Woodland Inventory Project – David Dawson was to contact Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre project officer Euan McKenzie which he has done but has not had a response as yet.

Proposed historical atlas project – a call out for anyone interested in the project was made in the minutes of the last meeting. There hasn't been any interest thus far. Tony Pratt was not able to attend this meeting. Julie wondered if a meeting was required to think about a way forwards.

2. Update from the Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre Introducing the new Archives Lead, Ally McConnell

Welcome to Ally – she worked at the History Centre previously from 2013 to 2017 on the Lacock Unlocked project and subsequently as a general Archivist. She has been working at Gloucestershire Archives in the interim and is now back to be the Principal Archivist being in post since November 2022, managing the archive team and the archive collection.

She is happy to say hello in person at the History Centre or answer any questions – ally.mcconnell@wiltshire.gov.uk

Historic Gardens project

Ruth Butler gave a summary *Rooted in History*: a speculative bid was made to TNA for testbed funding for archives to trial projects; a useful funding stream to test ideas

with less pressure on set outcomes and find successful ways to take ideas forward. WSHC proposed a project on a gardening theme, using the varied archives held for gardens/gardening including photos, recipe books, photo, nurseyman catalogues, plans and planting lists, stock books etc to inspire people to get gardening and improve physical and mental wellbeing. This idea was ultimately chosen as we were able to bring a community gardening project called Rooted Chippenham on board. Rooted are using the green space around the building to grow and have created a no dig garden already producing all sorts of things. The project is exploring a practical way to engage with archives and will also focus on sustainability, upcycling, recycling etc. Emily Malcolm has been employed as a project facilitator. The project has an activity plan, will be hosting events, hopes to work with a local school and will be using the Rooted group to advise. There will be an open day with Rooted gardeners on March 4th where resources and seeds will be available. Emily Malcolm is using social media under @YesterdaysSt0ry. Rooted are @RootedChippenham on Instagram and Facebook.

Anne Trevett: any potential for rolling it out elsewhere in the county? Particularly thinking of Salisbury where local gardener Becky Twig works on St Clements churchyard (abandoned in the 1870s), and a community garden at Leisure Centre. Ruth Butler agreed it has potential to expand and the current project serves as a trial to find ways it could be developed and taken forwards in various ways, including by Libraries (Malmesbury Library had considered doing something). Other future partners could include Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, and Wessex Water but the current project is limited in focus.

DigiCreative Heritage Project

WSHC was awarded NLHF money to work with people struggling with education, mostly young people but it was not restricted to particular age groups. This is another pilot project; it struggled to get participants at the first attempt with partners Building Bridges and Prime Theatre, but with a colourful promotional leaflet and with the involvement of support workers the take-up achieved the aim of twelve participants including people with aspergers, autism, dyslexia, social anxiety. We have had plenty of interest in further work, with referrers keen for another similar project. The challenge will now be how to be able to get funding to continue.

Participants look for and research archive material, use Excel to input information, and gain inspiration to work with a creative practitioner to make some creative work (including animation, collage and print-making, and working sound and audio or a combination).

It has been successful so far with positive feedback from participants who have been keen to engage. WSHC are also learning from them with ways to move forwards with aim to be more inclusive and remove barriers for people. We look forward to a celebration event at the end of January at Chippenham Library where the creative work will be on display.

Ruth Butler: has noted the positivity and buzz around the building when sessions are taking place. She aims to have a chat with work skills colleagues at Wiltshire Council so they know what we can offer and also link to work experience programme.

Jean Belt enquired regarding the age range. Julie confirmed that the project was initially intended to be 16+ and someone in their 40s had signed up. The age range of the final group is 16-28. The majority of support worker referrals have been younger people. But the aim of the project is not restricted to particular age groups.

The NLHF has become much more supportive of the quality of work with small groups and not just focussed on numbers.

3. Update from Wiltshire Victoria County History

James Holden: progress is being made towards Volume 19 covering south-west of county around Mere and Volume 20 the Chippenham area (of total 25 volumes) and work has also begun on Volume 21 covering the south-east of the county around Alderbury and Whiteparish.

Vol 19 has two remaining parishes to research (Stourton and Maiden Bradley).

Vol 20 is nearing completion with the last parishes (the Kingtons) being researched.

Edited by John Chandler. The next step will be to prepare photos, plans etc for publication which is aimed at the first half of 2025. The full edited text of the Chippenham volume will be available on the VCH website and the IHR website. The unedited work is currently already available.

Vol 21 has had one substantial contract completed for Whiteparish and Landford by Rosalind Johnson who is now working on Clarendon Park and will be starting on new parishes (Alderbury, Laverstock or the Bourne Valley) and will be talking to local history groups.

Much depends on funding, recent success has been had with external funding bodies. A series of online talks in 2022 were a success, thanks for David Dawson and the Wiltshire Museum for hosting. There will be a programme for 2023 but dates not yet fixed. The first will be in May and given by Caroline Dakers, prominent historian, particularly on Fonthill. Information will be published on Wiltshire Museum's website and the VCH website <https://www.wiltshirehistory.org/>

Julie Davis: pleased to hear doing well with income generation. Offered use of the History Centre as an additional host for events.

Anne Trevett: potential for hybrid events? Online lectures by the Olney and District History Society online have had audiences of 50 and hosted major national speakers with £25 charged for a series of lectures. Presence on website is not enough to advertise talks.

James Holden: in agreement regarding publicity and VCH benefits from Wiltshire Museum's marketing and reach. They have not yet ventured into hybrid events and will need to give it some thought. They have previously had success with online audiences having partnered with Bradford Museum with an audience of 450.

Julie Davis: WSHC is also investigating digital and hybrid events. The necessary equipment is now in place so it will be a case of ensuring the IT systems and technical knowledge and requirements are in place.

4. Group information share for those attending

David Dawson update from Wiltshire Museum: the "Voices from the Assize Court" oral history project is completed. There is a website with the results of the project which recorded memories of the former Assize Court with extracts, recordings and transcripts. A book of the memories has been published and is available from the Museum: <https://www.wiltshiremuseum.org.uk/product/voices-from-the-devizes-assize-court/>

Wiltshire Museum are starting to talk with Stourhead linking with work they are doing with Stourton over the summer.

Funding news: Wessex Museum National Portfolio has received three more years funding from the Arts Council 2023-2026 which includes extra funding to welcome the three Swindon Museums into the partnership. The current museum group includes Dorset Museum, Poole Museum, The Salisbury Museum and Wiltshire Museum to now be joined by Swindon Museum & Art Gallery, STEAM – Museum of the Great Western Railway and Lydiard House Museum.

Exhibitions: a planned exhibition which will include the work of Eric Walrond (Harlem Renaissance writer and journalist who came to the UK, worked in Bradford on Avon, Melksham and went to Roundway Hospital with mental health challenges, editing the hospital magazine). This will open towards the end of the year and it is planned to subsequently go to Bradford on Avon Museum.

Julie Davis: Update on Ancient Woodland project run by Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Record Centre. Project lead Euan McKenzie has so far checked 288 pre-1850 maps and has sufficient evidence to classify around 10,000 hectares of woodland and wood-pasture as ancient. Over the next few months, he aims to review at least a hundred more Estate and Enclosure Maps held at WSHC. He provided a bar chart which showed that the earliest evidence of much woodland appeared in maps dated 1710-1849 with the biggest volume appearing between 1830-1849. The earliest date of earliest evidence so far is 1610. The WSBRC had success in running an online volunteering project to support the work and now aims to start a survey of hedgerows using aerial photos and maps.

A reminder sent in from Stuart Raymond: please send books to him for review in the WAM magazine on samiraymond@btopenworld.com

Anne Trevett, Bemerton Local History Society: still not restarted in the same way as pre-Covid. Other than Frog Moody's Fisherton History Society, there is comparatively little work going on locally. One success has been the Silver Salisbury programme run by Irene Kohler, Salisbury's Older People's Champion working to get people out and about and help older isolated people. Local history has been a component of this project from the beginning. There were five well attended talks in 2022. They are now thinking of the 2023 programme.

Julie Davis notes Anne makes interesting point about post-Covid numbers still being down which is something WSHC are also finding although events at Libraries have fared better with a number at Melksham Library being well attended. The appetite for heritage is there.

Julie has started planning Local History Month (May) and is hoping local history groups would like to put up displays at the local libraries to garner interest for them. There is a big footfall in libraries and Julie plans to make Local History Month a key month in the calendar to help local history groups thrive. **Action: all.** Please contact Julie if this would be of interest julie.davis@wiltshire.gov.uk

Jean Belt, Purton Historical Society: The Society held three successful talks during the autumn including member, Keith Allsop, speaking on Ringsbury Camp and the Iron Age. This meeting of local interest attracted 45 members and friends. 30 people enjoyed the Christmas Social when the musical entertainment was provided by The White Horse Folk Club from Highworth.

There will be talks on 26th January and 23rd February, followed by the AGM in March with photographs of the Nostalgic Lydiard Vintage Car Rally of 1989.

After its winter closure the museum will be reopening at the beginning of April. The exhibition on Education at St Mary's School was a success. Visitors and stewards recounted tales of playground escapades, special teachers and sporting triumphs, while some previously unidentified adults and children in the many photographs on display were named. The team of volunteers has increased to 15.

The two copies of The Golden Chapter, Purton's record of all those involved in WW1, with Bob Lloyd's additional information, were dedicated during the Remembrance Day Service in St Mary's Church. They are now available for research.

The Society currently has 51 members who paid a £15 subscription in 2022 and the same amount will be charged this year. Admission to the Museum is free but many visitors leave donations. They would be interested to hear about the subscription costs of other societies to find out if they are similar.

The Chairman's 16 year old granddaughter continues to help update the website.

Julie was impressed with the involvement of young people working on their Duke of Edinburgh Award. Enquiries from those interested in volunteering at Wiltshire Libraries could be referred to local museums as Julie thinks WL often get more young people enquiring than they can manage.

Action: Julie to contact Wiltshire Libraries about possible DofE referrals

Gillian Swanton: The Ridgeway National Trail celebrated the 50th anniversary of formation of the trail, gathering at The Sanctuary/Avebury.

Avebury chapel is in hibernation at moment. There will be events in August details to be confirmed.

Peter Roberts, Redlynch & History Society: shared the method of transcription of the 1921 census that enabled access at a reasonable price. As requested at the meeting Peter has provided details about the project and how they achieved it, which are attached at the end of the minutes. Peter is happy to give further advice to anyone interested on peter.robertsnf@tiscali.co.uk

Peter enquired if anyone has experience of digitising their archive?

Membership numbers have reached the 80s, not quite yet back at pre-Covid levels. A successful season of speakers in 2022 including 71 members on a foul January night to Peter's talk put together at short notice following a speaker cancellation.

Peter asked if anyone has experience of using the Lloyd George 1910 Finance Act books – how much work is there to look at one parish? They are being digitised for The Genealogist but it will be a while before the project covers the whole country. Julie noted that she uses the maps and schedules often and that they are well worth looking at, doing a similar job to the tithe awards. She likes to look at them in combination with the 1911 census.

Julie asked Peter how he had achieved success with increasing numbers of members. Peter noted the census transcription project, local talks and encouraging friends and locals to come along.

Julie Davis: mentioned numbers were low in last meeting and not too many present at this one. Naomi confirmed there are 96 on mailing list. Jane Howells had suggested an earlier start at 6.30 but consensus at the meeting was the some would

find it hard to get there for that time. A time of 7pm was suggested as a potential compromise but some still preferred 7.30pm. Any suggestions or thoughts on how to improve the Network are welcomed. Anne Trevett highlighted the success of the former Saturday events under the WLHF. Julie confirmed that a similar idea of a one-day event with multiple speakers had been discussed at a meeting of managers at the History Centre. There is some money left from the folding of the WLHF which could be used for one event. People may be interested in topics such as self-publishing, the census return work, how to attract more people to local history groups for example should attract interest. Would people be in favour of such an event?

Action: Julie to work with Ruth Butler (in charge of events at the History Centre) to look at arranging an event for the autumn

Gillian Swanton noted that putting information about the WLHN on parish websites or circulating to parish clerks would be a good way to advertise the Network. Julie confirmed that the History Centre used to have a list of contacts for parish clerks, but it is now outdated, but the library service may have something. A little piece promoting WLHN could be written to send out. **Action: Julie**

It was agreed that everyone enjoyed and valued the Network, the swapping of information is a useful and interesting chance to learn from each other.

5. Suggested date of next meeting

Wednesday 19th April 2023. Agreed to be online so members further south in the county are able to easily attend with the possibility of creating a hybrid event if WSHC has the technological capabilities in time.

1921 Census project for Redlynch History Society

The digitised version of this census return for England and Wales was released in January 2022. It was available at a cost from a Genealogical Website or free from Kew, Aberystwyth and Manchester. The structure is similar to the 1911 census in that each household has an individual page. In the 1921 case there is an additional page with the address and the enumeration details. Key differences are the inclusion of employer and employment place.

The area we chose to look at was the current parish. This immediately raises difficulties as there have been additions and subtractions to the area in the last 100 years.

I contacted the British Association for Local History explaining why there was a need for local societies to access the data. Whilst being sympathetic they were unable to help directly, explaining a contract between Kew and Find My Past wasn't going to change the accessibility. However they suggested I contact a researcher directly to obtain the information. Ruth Bloom charged on an hourly basis and could not have been more helpful. To establish what was needed she had to look at the 1921 enumeration district maps for us to agree the area involved. It is also very useful to have a note of the enumeration district description as this will help mapping the route of the enumerator.

Ultimately the cost to us was 3 hours work which was £75 and compares somewhat favourably with the £1596 from the Genealogical Website. Our researcher was very helpful as we were learning as we went, not appreciating all of the changes to the parish when we started. We did add to the cost by obtaining digital copies of the Ordnance Survey maps at a scale of 25 inches to the mile. Four of these totalled £43.20.

Method

I chose a popular local pub, transcribed the information on to a spreadsheet with the fields I felt appropriate, following the order of the original and including the enumeration district and address from the second household sheet. At our September meeting, which we make a members evening, with short (10 minute) presentations I introduced the 1921 census and showed the samples and then asked for volunteers to sign up. To my delight we had 15 members take up the challenge. I offered further assistance for those unfamiliar or rusty with spreadsheets which was taken up by three people.

I then divided up the material we had into 10 household units these were sent out along with the samples of the original and transcript and a further spreadsheet with just the headings and a brief guide. Most people completed their work in a reasonable time and a number asked for more. A positive email update on progress effectively acted as a reminder and so the basic transcription was completed within a couple of months. There was the odd anomaly and a few reading errors but not too many. It wasn't a long job to amend and then add the spreadsheets together in order.

Further work is now being undertaken on mapping this on to the 1924 OS maps and checking our archives for additional material. There are numerous ways the data can be examined including changing occupations, what was new, what was dying out, how far people travelled to work, how many worked for certain employers. Did many women work beyond the home and of course comparisons with former census.

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