



Wiltshire Local History Network

Meeting
Wednesday 15th April, 7.30pm
Online via Zoom

Minutes

Present: Julie Davis (Chair), Naomi Oakley (WSHC), David Dawson, Sue Lewis, Tina, Jean Belt, Stuart Raymond, Tim Couzens, John Chandler, Jamie Wright, James Holden, Rob Miller

Apologies: David Gilks, Ally McConnell, Lucy Lewis, Nick Baxter, Peter Roberts, Brian Edwards, Dr 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

Action Julie to book Easterton Village Hall for conference

Done. Talk suggestions and a programme has been developed – too many of interest to include all. Sue Lewis and Helen Taylor (WSHC and Wiltshire Record Society) will help with refreshments.

Action Brian Edwards – send copies of articles to Julie. He has sent them.

If anyone else has written articles relating to Wiltshire, then please send to Julie if you are happy for them to be added to the Local Studies Library collection at the History Centre.

Action all

2. Update from Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre:

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

A national project, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, to bring together information from First World War military service tribunals which heard appeals for exemption from conscription. The project is being led by Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre and involves 15 archive services in England and Wales. The project started in January and will run until January 2028.

All project officers have been appointed, and work is getting underway with volunteers being recruited to begin indexing and research work. Indexing has begun at WSHC and at Wigan. Some initial blogs have been posted in the project Substack page: [Grounds for Appeal | Hannah Salisbury | Substack](#) A full website will be launched during the course of the project which will host the full database of records of men appealing for exemption.

Moonrakers Educafe at WSHC

The Educafe (community space and café for connection inspired by history and heritage) has had a trial run with new volunteers, there are seven in place and some more potential. The Educafe will running once a fortnight on a Monday and more volunteers will be needed to ensure cover. The pilot session hosted 20 service providers to try it out before opening on Monday 27th April.

There are numerous activities and spaces including a dungeons and dragons games corner, a craft corner is being developed with jewellery making, crochet etc, and sewing bunting (incorporating use of different languages). There has been positive feedback including comments about a nice, relaxed atmosphere and an enthusiastic response for a well-needed community space. There are homemade cakes available in the café (education room).

[Introducing Moonrakers' Educafe at WSHC - Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre](#)

3. WLHN/Wiltshire Record Society Study Day

Julie has booked Easterton Village Hall, near Devizes. The event will be put on Eventbrite to book (or booking via email). It will be hosted as a joint study day with Wiltshire Record Society and is titled *Building on the Past: A Miscellany for Local Historians* and as previously *will be free to attend with donations welcome on the day.*

John Chandler has organised the programme which has been finalised. There are 5 speakers:

Steve Hobbs – on evidence of domestic life in Wiltshire in late 16th-early 17th centuries

Kevin Eames – on W.J. Stent (an undervalued Wiltshire architect)

Jamie Wright – 17th century brickworks in Wiltshire

John Chandler – the naming of houses

Matt Bristow – on 20th century pubs (keynote) “Never drink in a flat-roofed pub”

All talks are 30-35 mins except keynote which is 45 and the Wiltshire Record Society AGM will happen over the lunchbreak. It will be an important one as both the positions of treasurer and president are needing to be filled.

Helen Taylor will send out the AGM agenda and leaflet to all WRS members before the meeting along with details of the conference.

The day will run from 10am until 4pm– coffee and refreshments are available and comfort and coffee breaks available throughout day but people will need to bring their own lunches.

John asked if members of the Network would like to chair sessions. Julie confirmed she is happy to do so. **Action all** (email naomi.oakley@wiltshire.gov.uk or Julie.davis@wiltshire.gov.uk if you would like to volunteer to help with this)

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

David Dawson, Wiltshire Museum:

Assize Court project is getting going after funding awarded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. New staff are starting shortly and there is likely to be people working on new site in the new year. There is an industrial archaeology conference in October – details to be shared for the next meeting.

Sue Lewis: u3a, Warminster

Members are still coming and enjoying the programme. Sue noted that all the talks have been engaging. Steve Hobbs had stepped in to deliver a talk on crime and punishment when a speaker had to cancel at the last minute.

Sue later added that she has set a 30 miles radius around Warminster for local history topics for the talks programme. This includes Gillingham, Salisbury, Blandford Forum. If anyone knows of reasonably priced individuals who would come to Warminster to talk about that area then let Sue know (email naomi.oakley@wiltshire.gov.uk) Tisbury if within the radius. Tina will forward information about speaker on Etheldred Bennett on. **Action Tina**

Tina Richards, Tisbury

They have had a successful winter talk season –including a good talk on geologist Etheldred Benett, and Neil Burton on Georgain homes and sewage. Next month Dorothy Treasure, Wiltshire Buildings Record will talk about vernacular architecture in Wiltshire, and there are outings planned to the new art centre at Sherborne, Dorset along with a visit to the Abbey, as well as a trip to Great Chalfield Manor.

A Society member has contributed to book on Blackmore Vale Railway: chapter 4 on Tisbury.

They have been able to buy a new computer and equipment for talks, and for the archive thanks to money made with community publication: Eminent Tisburgers

Tina is president (no longer chairman)

Jean Belt and Lucy Lewis, Purton Historical Society: [update via email]

The Purton Historical Society events have been well supported during the first quarter of 2026. Membership has increased to 56 and several visitors have attended.

“Shackleton – Man of Dreams”, February’s subject, was followed by the AGM in March.

After the usual business three members presented their research – Marion Hobbs gave an account of her husband’s earliest holidays in the 1930s, Jenny Barnes related the history of The Silver Threads Hall, now Pips Community Café, a great asset to the village, and lastly Keith Allsop outlined the history of Ladybird Books. He owns a large collection!

On 23rd April Dr Gillian White’s subject is “Mary Queen of Scots”. In May Andy Hood will present the findings of the “Romans in Purton” project, from the test pit digging mainly in Dogridge and Pavenhill gardens, but including other areas of the village, during 2024 and 2025. The Museum has a new exhibition which can be seen on Tuesdays from 3.00pm-5.30pm. In addition, it will open on the last Saturday of each month from 10.00am-12.30pm. “Purton on a Plate” is already proving to be of great interest to visitors! It highlights some of the food outlets and organisations that have fed Purtonians over many years and crockery used by various groups.

Stuart Raymond

The latest WRS volume is now out: *The Holford Papers: Avebury 1695-1798*. It is a collection of letters written by Richard Holford and successors in relation to Manor of Avebury. Tim Couzens noted it is very good. Also newly released is an updated edition of *Words from Wills* published by the British Association for Local History.

Stuart is book reviews editor for WAM; he is always on the lookout for new books to be reviewed in the magazine. Send information to Stuart (via WLHN) if you have one to share.

Tim Couzens:

Tim is following up on a programme about South Wraxall Manor with Dan Cruickshank for which contributed a character witness to the Longs (Sir Richard Long, one of Henry VIII inner circle but who gets little attention. He was a fascinating character, enforcer of secret work, and also looked after hunting) Information can be found on Tim's website.

<https://draycotestatehistory.wordpress.com/2025/11/30/sir-richard-long/>

John Chandler

Chippenham VCH volume will come out shortly. 2026 is the 400th anniversary of John Aubrey's birth and Chippenham Museum is coordinating a year of celebration. John and colleague Louise Ryland Epton have published a formerly unpublished John Aubrey manuscript *John Aubrey's Villa*. Louise is working on a new edition of John Aubrey's *Natural History* which should be an eyeopener about the man and about the state of 17th knowledge and science. As part of the celebrations John recently published a new book on history of Chippenham - *Chippenham: Our History* - a popular history of the town. "Chippenham: Our History" is also the project title for the year. There was a launch event in March with a cake of John Aubrey. Julie noted that Chippenham Museum were doing a brilliant job organising a community celebration with lots going on in the town this summer; it was bringing something positive for everyone in Chippenham to enjoy.

Victoria County History: new volume is at the printers. The index and final editing have been completed. The volumes should be available at the end of May with a provisional plan to formally launch in early July at Chippenham Museum. Pre-order publicity has been sent out with a small discount and has had some interest. It is the culmination of a decade or more of work by researchers, trustees and fundraisers, James Holden particularly. Mere area volume is mostly done and being organised from central office in London. Mark Forrest has been working on that volume, and has made good progress, expecting to be finished by end 2027/early 2028.

Alderbury and Froxfield hundred – nearly half has been done, Mark and Louise are currently working on Pitton and Farley. Mark is making interesting discoveries about Pitton. Other parishes still to research.

Trustees have decided on the next volume which will be on the Corsham, Lacock, Box area. John has scoped which parishes to include.

Jamie Wright, Fisherton and Bemerton

Jamie noted that there is reputed to be Christopher Wren designed almshouse and church in Pitton, both built around 1700. There were probably temporary brickworks there. Jamie had also previously contacted the VCH researcher working on Whiteparish to extend the record of ceramic work by three centuries.

Jamie has researched additional material on fountains and will be writing an article for WAM focusing on a vicar/curate at Amesbury called Thomas Holland who designed water fountains.

Jamie summarised detail about Thomas Holland who had taken out patent in 1691 for engine to raise water, specifically to drain mines. He was involved in Somerset Coal Mines, and Jamie saw a manuscript in Taunton with plans of engines drawing water from mines. By 1700, a fountain had been installed at Wilton House which didn't require a reservoir – the engine would supply water directly to the fountain. Jamie would like to talking to anyone who is interested in Wilton House gardens and designs. Email naomi.oakley@wiltshire.gov.uk to be put in touch. John Chandler noted that John Aubrey designed fountain about the same time, designs never materialised.

The History Society has talks on alternate months and meets in library now.

Jamie also represents South Wilts Industrial Archaeology Society who have finished meetings for Autumn and spring, and the next season's programme is being organised. They had a good talk on printing by William Rabbs (based in Newton Tony). People really enjoyed remembering the machines from their youth.

James Holden, VCH:

John covered most VCH matters, but James wanted to reflect that vol 20 on Chippenham volume is great achievement, and has taken long time to get realised. Progress on Vol 21 has comparatively seemed swift and reached half-way point quite quickly. There is a small number of volumes to complete – 5 in total. It costs around £200,00 for one volume to be produced due to intensive research work so plans are being made for a major fundraising drive in late 2026 in hopes that can get sizeable sum to plough ahead with confidence to finish south-east, and then move on to the Corsham/Box/Lacock volume. Julie noted that they History Centre will do whatever can to help VCH to help continue.

Rob Miller, Malmesbury History Society:

They had a good talk from John Chander on Maud Heath and causeway and are also interested in John Aubrey and his relationship with Thomas Hobbes. Looking forward to exhibition.

There will be a festival in July - Malmesbury Magical History tour - over a weekend in late July. There will be talks, live performances and a debate on Malmesbury's greatest road. There will be a trail around town for people to whole spend weekend, and witches exhibition (relating to book on John Aubrey on *The Last Witch Craze* by Tony McAleavy. Julie noted how good the Athelstan 1100 celebrations were, last year's Malmesbury witches exhibition and Tony McAleavy's brilliant book 'The Last Witch Craze: John Aubrey, the Royal Society and the Witches'.

Andrew Robson, (apologies sent: update via email):

Working, with others, on the history of Amesbury Abbey Church, and additionally on the history of its musical arrangements.

4. Suggested date of next meeting

22nd July 2026, 7.30pm via Zoom