



Wiltshire Local History Network

Meeting
Wednesday 22 July, 7.30pm
Online via Zoom

Minutes

Present: Julie Davis (Chair), Naomi Oakley (WSHC), John Chandler, Jean Belt, Stuart Raymond, Sue Lewis, Ruth Butler, John Brownell, Jean Belt, Anne Goodyear, Tim Couzens, Graham Grist, Stephen Smith, Marion Hobbs

Apologies: Ally McConnell, Ruth Newman, Lucy Lewis, Dr Jane Howells, Brian Edwards, James Holden, Peter Roberts, Arlene Bishop, Wendy Lawrence

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

1. Actions from previous meeting

Action Tina Richards to send details of speaker on Etheldred Bennett to Sue Lewis **Action Julie to follow up**

2. Update from Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre:

Grounds for Appeal project

A National Lottery Heritage Fund project lead by WSHC to combine information from applications for exemption from conscription to military service in the First World War from 16 different archive services in England and Wales into a single searchable database.

We have now been collecting data into the 'master spreadsheet' for the Grounds for Appeal project for about 3 months. The database currently includes details of 23,906 Tribunal cases. 21,859 of those have been contributed from existing datasets. 2,047 are new cases entered by GFA project volunteers. It is really exciting to be bringing the data together for the first time.

For Wiltshire records survive for three Tribunals and those for Calne Rural and Calne Borough are nearly completed, with Pewsey to be added next. There will be the opportunity for research work into some of the cases flagged as particularly interesting as we move more into the research phase. Naomi will share details of that to the mailing list if anyone would like to be involved.

Project Substack blog highlights stories: <https://wwigroundsforappeal.substack.com/>
Dr Angus Wallace, the project historical consultant, recently interviewed Ivor Slocombe who undertook pioneering work into the Tribunals which is available on the History Centre YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/Geg3YQRVt4?si=bK7e2xDH309wqMrG>

Wiltshire Local History Network and Wiltshire Record Society Study Day:

Positive feedback about the Study Day held in May. The venue worked fine and parking managed for the good number of attendees (around 40). Julie noted that she had heard more people had wanted to come but were busy with other things. Julie proposed considering another time of year, but later discussion concluded that any time of year risked people being busy with something.

There were engaging speakers and the feedback indicated people had enjoyed it. Sue Lewis noted there was a good variety of talks on different topics with plenty of unexpected and new information to learn.

Julie expressed her appreciation for help from John in the organisation of the programme, and that she felt combining with the WRS worked well. John was happy to help again next year. Stuart noted there were not many members of the WRS at the AGM, and Julie hoped that perhaps more members could be persuaded to come next year.

Sue Lewis helped a lot in the kitchen, alongside Helen Taylor. They will need more support in the kitchen next year as two people were not quite enough to wash up and serve. There could be the option of squash at lunchtime with disposable cups to ease pressure as it was sometimes difficult to serve everyone at particular times, such as just before the start. Sue shared that the cake got good reviews!

Julie would like to improve the planning and seek more help on the day for next year. **Action Julie to contact Bromham Village Hall for more information (such as what equipment is available, facilities for self-catering) and have a visit prior to booking, and book for next year. Provisional date of Saturday 15th May.**

Action all: consider topics of interest and send thoughts to Julie or Naomi

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

Jean Belt, Purton Historical Society

On 28th May Andy Hood, the lead archaeologist, presented the findings of the “Romans in Purton” project, the programme of test digging in 27 gardens in various parts of the village during 2024 and 2025. The pits were roughly 1metre square and up to a metre deep. As more than 60 people were expected to attend, we met in the Village Hall.

The report can be downloaded from the Purton Museum website. It gives details of every pit, what was found, with specialist reports. There is a small exhibition in the Museum about the project, with some Roman items for inspection.

In the late 19th century some village organisations could afford their own crockery. The Working men’s Institute and Coffee Tavern, St Mary’s Church and the Purton Chapels had branded china cups, saucers and plates of various sizes. “Purton on a Plate” can be seen in the Museum until the end of October, on Tuesdays from 3.00pm-5.30pm and the last Saturday in each month from 10.00am-12.30pm.

30 members and friends enjoyed a guided stroll round Upper Square on the evening of 11th June, looking at some historic sites and buildings, then walking through the new Orchards housing estate.

We hope the PHS display at the Village Centre on 13th June, as part of the Purton Festival Community event, will have attracted some new members!

On 24th September Keith Allsop's subject is "The Fields of Purton part 2, the agricultural history from 1086-1744." He will lead a guided walk of landscape features mentioned in the talk the following Saturday, at 2.00pm.

Julie asked for Jean to update WLHN on the Fields of Purton event as it sounded a really nice combination of talk followed by guided walk the following week.

Wendy Lawrence, Kennet u3a

April: Kennet u3a member Linda King gave a truly fascinating talk about the aristocratic St John family and their historical importance.

May: A regular visitor to our meetings Nick this time captivated us with the story of Matthew Wilkinson, First Master of Marlborough College.

June: It is always a pleasure to have a u3a member present a talk and in June one of our own gave us Part II of her talk about the celebrated Georgian and Regency portraitist Thomas Lawrence.

Julie noted that some societies can find it hard to find members to give talks. If societies who have managed this would like to share insights into encouraging members to give talks that might be very helpful for other members. Any information to circulate (on this or other topics) can be sent to Naomi on naomi.oakley@wiltshire.gov.uk

Tina Richards, Tisbury History Society:

Tisbury History Society has had a very successful season with talks each month from September to June. We now have 100 members. In July there were two Society outings, one to the new Sherborne Arts Centre and the other to Great Chalfield Manor. The Committee is at present working hard to bring the Society's web site up to date. Sales of our books are going well, and we have had to reprint Eminent Tisburghers. Talks are planned for all of the next season, starting in September.

Julie proposed seeing how willing Tina might be to share some of her work on the Eminent Tisburghers book and the involvement of the history society, were all the contributors to the book members or did they become members for example? **Action Julie to contact Tina**

Stuart Raymond

Let Stuart know of any new books that need to be reviewed in the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine. Stuart would welcome a review copy.

Julie checked whether Stuart received the Wiltshire List as part of the WSHC newsletter (listing all the new additional to the Local Studies library), It is also available on the WSHC website: <https://wshc.org.uk/intelligencer-incorporating-past-matters/>

Sue Lewis, Warminster U3A

They have had varied talks including from Emily Naish, archivist at Salisbury Cathedral talking about their archive; Mike Stone gave a really interesting talk the development of

transport 'from wagons to cars'. They also enjoyed a visit to the shoemakers' museum in Street.

Stuart Burroughs, Museum Director of Museum of Bath at Work gave a brilliant talk on development of industry on Bath. Sue noted that he has a whole host of talks to offer which would likely to have something of interest to most groups.

John Brownell

Joined when he attended the study day and had found it fascinating. He has been a National Trust henge and landscape guide at Avebury and has also started looking at the history of mother's family and found that some ancestors married at Avebury church and has since researched them.

He would be willing to give a talk on Avebury stone circle and has particular knowledge about Alexander Keiller and his digs. Keiller's photographs have all been digitised, and John was able to decipher Keiller's handwriting in his diaries. <https://www.aveburypapers.org/>

Julie will note Avebury as a possible topic for next year's study day.

Anne Goodyear, Malmesbury

Due to adverse weather the planned talk on John Aubrey was postponed but will happen in the autumn.

Interesting research about Malmesbury Castle was presented at the previous meeting. It has never been clear where castle was, and a member had done a lot of research using techniques like LIDAR, which got some discussions going.

A new exhibition in the Athelstan Museum focuses on the connection between Malmesbury and United States. A large number of people left in 19th century to go to the USA, notably Cleveland. A member of the museum lives in house built by one of the people that came back, and she has researched and found 600 names of people of Malmesbury who went to the States over a 100 year period.

Stuart noted, relating to John Aubrey: Hobnob have just reproduced John Aubrey's Villa which reproduces early mss and Julie agreed it was a lovely reproduction

Tim Couzens

Tim is working with Dr William Poole from Oxford University on letters from the Longs at Draycot and John Aubrey, going through references and cross referencing with other parts of correspondence to get footnotes ready for Poole's publication on Aubrey's complete correspondence which is to be published next year along with full biography by Dr Kate Bennett (also Oxford University).

Julie noted that anniversaries are a great catalyst for more work to appear on historical figures such as Aubrey.

Tim highlighted the Monkton Park re-enactment of the Battle of Chippenham where Royalist Sir James Long led his troops into Chippenham. Julie noted that the History Centre will be attending with a tent and are finalising a display for that.

Stephen Smith, Malmesbury and Sutton Benger

The Benger Trails website is up and running and is about to get a refresh with Sutton Benger parish council helping. Stephen will update when that has happened.

He recently had a contact from an Australian through the Benger Trails website, the grandson of Hull family of Sutton Benger's Hull's Wine and Cheese Emporium. He provided more information about the family that Stephen will research into.

Julie was reminded of working with a gentleman who had been a longtime resident of Ramsbury. His late wife was a writer and artist who wrote about Ramsbury from the 1950s-1970s and created a visual collage of reminiscences of the village. Julie offered to support him to get the work published and it should now be published in the autumn. She will share when it has been published, as it was a really heartfelt and poignant social history of a village at that moment in time.

Marion Hobbs, Purton

Interesting stories emerged of prominent buildings during a guided walk such as the workhouse and the women living there in the 1940s and 1950s, the Congregational church (now the scout hall) with stories of children going to playgroup there, and the Red Gables children's home (knocked down in 1981) which became a housing development, hearing stories of the families and children who had lived there.

Julie noted how important it is for this information not to be lost. Marion agreed and that she would look into ways of recording it.

Stuart Raymond enquired about the recent VCH volume publication, and it was confirmed that it had recently been released. Julie discussed the value of the physical volumes VCH in libraries (copies available in the major Wiltshire libraries), although the online version is useful too. News about the publication will be shared on the WSHC Facebook page and in the next WSHC newsletter at the beginning of August.

4. Suggested date of next meeting

28 October 2026, 7.30pm via Zoom