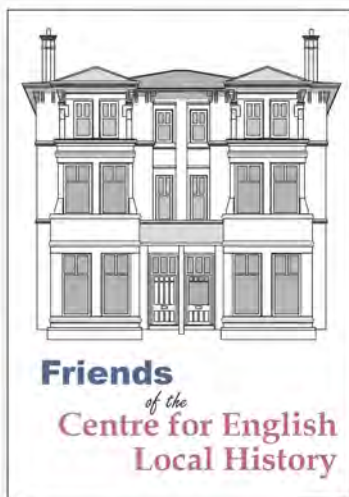




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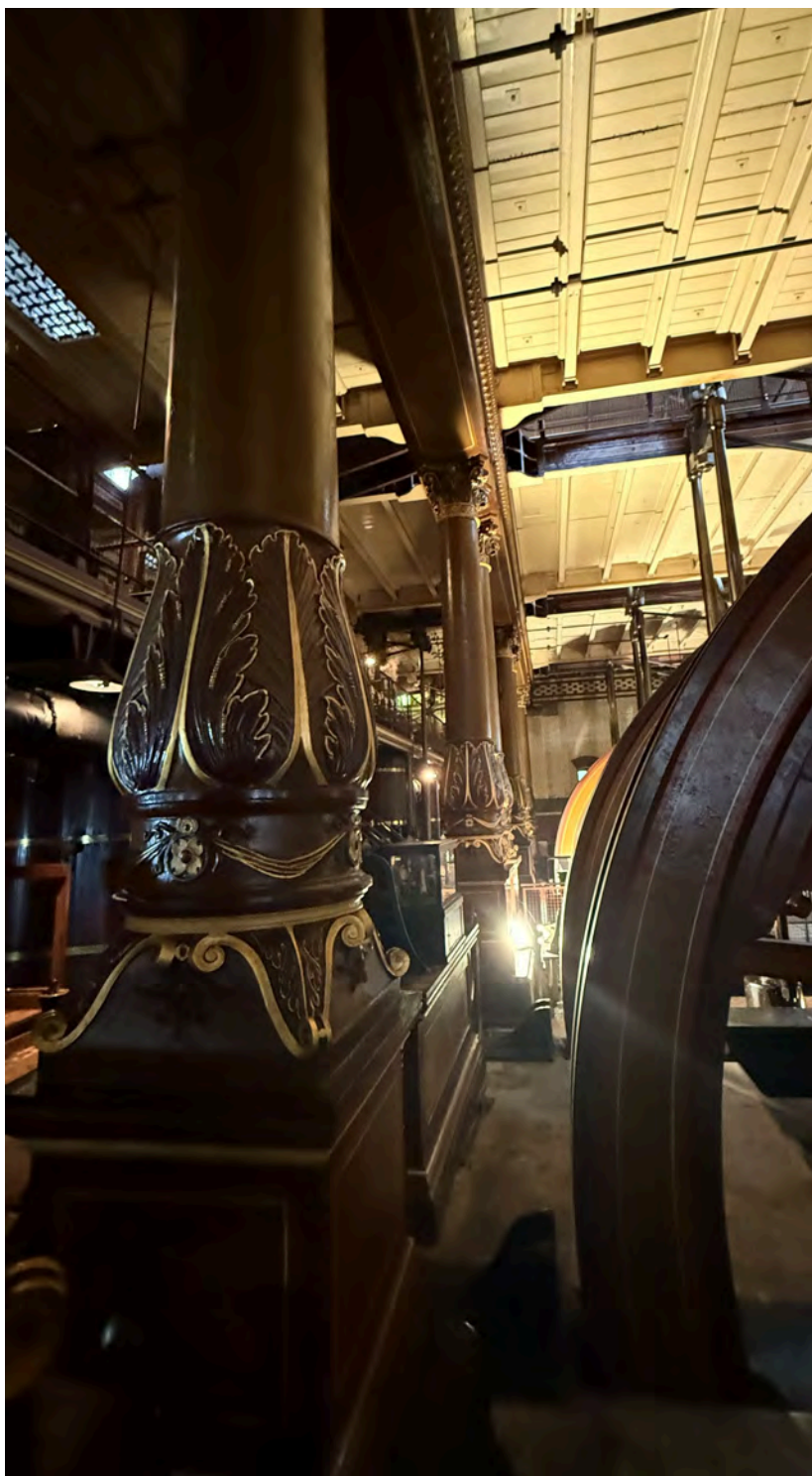
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Newsletter

OCTOBER 2026 • NUMBER 39

**Welcome to the Friends Newsletter for 2026 -
packed with news and items of interest for
the discerning local historian**

Cover photo: Abbey Pumping Station, Leicester



WE'RE STILL HERE

EDITORIAL

While you might worry about whether there is still a Centre to be friends of, we are here to ensure you that, yes, there is.

Across the country, university history departments are being reduced or closed altogether (and other humanities disciplines are faring much worse).

And yet the streaming platforms, podcast providers, TV and YouTube channels are all brimming with history content. There is an appetite for history of all kinds out there. There must be hope.

Strap in while the 2026 Newsletter takes flight...

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Chair's Report

This is my report as Chair of the Friends for 2025/2026. In June of 2025 the University announced that History, including the Centre for Regional and Local History would be part of a change consultation process due to financial pressures facing the University. The outcome of the review was that the University offered voluntary severance to reduce the number of posts by six in History. As part of this process Dr Angela Muir left the University at the end of June 2026. The Friends committee would like to thank Dr Muir for her help over the years and especially for organising events and

administering the various grants schemes on our behalf.

Thankfully Dr Richard Jones remains in post as acting Director of the Centre, and the committee has expressed their full support to Dr Jones as the future of the Centre emerges. The committee of the Friends remain committed to promoting and supporting the study of Local History as taught by the Centre. We support post-graduate students and PhD researchers with Small Grant Awards to help meet research and travel costs. We would like to do more of course so if you know of any current postgraduates or PhD candidates who are studying some aspect of Local History at the University of Leicester, please direct them to the application form on the website.

<https://www.englishlocalhistory.org/wp/the-friends-grants-and-bursaries/>

During the past year we have made Small Grants to four PhD candidates and covered the travel costs for a BA student on placement to the Spalding Gentlemen's Society. Our other grant, The Phythian-Adams Award, provides financial assistance to students studying for the BA in History at Leicester University who are preparing their dissertation topics and need to visit and conduct research at an archive within the UK. Applications can be made via Dr Richard Jones.

Hoskins Day was thoroughly enjoyed by all who attended with one committee member describing the Keynote presentation by Prof Rob Liddiard, from the University of East Anglia, as a 'cracker'. His talk was entitled "Shall we fight them on the beaches?: Landscapes of coastal defence in the Second World War". Professor Liddiard focused on how the building of extensive anti-invasion defences along the coastline changed not only the physical landscape but also shaped the lives and experience of local communities who suddenly found themselves on Britain's front line. He revealed new insights into a subject normally the preserve of military archaeologists.

The Focus on the Centre part of the day showcased the recent work of two PhD students. Carol Gurnham is a M4C/AHRC PhD student at the University of Leicester, and her talk was entitled 'Window into the Neolithic:

Analysing landscape patterns through a Medieval lens'. Although Carol's research is focused on the Neolithic occupation, for Hoskins Day she focused on medieval ridge and furrow and its relation to antecedent prehistoric landscapes.

Julie Chamberlain is also a M4C/AHRC funded PhD student at the University, and her presentation was entitled 'The utensils of my trade: women's paid work and businesses in Warwickshire towns 1660-1740'. As the title suggests, Julie focussed her talk on the paid work for women, but she is also researching the role of women in guilds in Coventry and Stratford.

About two-thirds of the people who had booked for Hoskins Day were present, but it was an extremely hot day so that was expected. The Special Collections team at the David Wilson Library reported that the display of Hoskins related material was very popular with both people wanting to book for a further visit and offers of donations.

There have been two undergraduate student placements this year at Spalding Gentleman's Society who are currently running the Fenland Study centre at Ayscoughfee Hall. One was working on the collections and another on the VCH project.

The committee would like to thank all of you who completed the survey about the Study Days. Unfortunately, after analysing all the responses there was no real agreement about places to visit, distance or topic etc. The one common thread was working with local history groups or societies either at a regional level or to work in partnership with these for our local visits. The committee will look at the topic again during the coming year.

The work of the Friends is reliant on the donations made by you, our members, and we would like to thank you for your continued support. Although our numbers remain stable at around 165 members, we face the challenge of recruiting new members at a time when MA student numbers have declined.

I would like to express my personal thanks to the committee, Karen, Mary, Mandy, Sue, John and Michael, for all their hard work again this past year. We look forward to working with Dr Richard Jones at the Centre and we would like to thank you all for supporting the Friends both in the past and as we navigate new horizons. We always welcome new members to join the committee or stand as officers so please consider this if you are interested.

Anne Coyne

Chair of the Friends of the Centre for English Local History



Centre *Nostalgia*



Get misty-eyed over
some photos from
old editions of the
Newsletter



HOSKINS DAY

ATTENBOROUGH BUILDING, LEICESTER, JUNE 10

Once again we held Hoskins Day at the Centre's home in the Attenborough building. We also repeated the special tours of the David Wilson Library, this time including a look at the Hoskins archive. We continue to have supporting papers as well as the 'main' event. This year Carol Gurnham shared her work on the missing long barrows of Leicestershire and Rutland while Julie Chamberlain told us about women's active roles in the 17th and 18th century industries of five Warwickshire towns.

ROBERT LIDDIARD

'Shall we fight them on the beaches?': landscapes of coastal defence in the Second World War

The University of East Anglia's Professor Robert Liddiard was our keynote speaker.

This year's Hoskins lecture was quite a departure from our normal Hoskins fare: the landscape of wartime defences in East Anglia. Our lecturer started by pondering whether Hoskins himself would have approved of the subject, having mused upon the 'barbaric England' built from the 1940s onwards under the threat of invasion.

Wartime structures might not be pretty or romantic but are an important part of our heritage. The lecture was divided into two parts: an account of the research so far undertaken on the East Anglian landscape, and an evaluation of how viewing the subject of international conflict through the lens of landscape might yield some unique insights.

The defences that are the subject of this research were initially constructed in 1940, extended in 1941, adapted in 1942, maintained in 1943, and dismantled in 1944. The project has so far concentrated on the Suffolk coast and its very particular juxtaposition of beaches, heath, and wetlands. Research started with the documentation generated by military planning at the highest level, and looked at the differences between the aspiration and the application.

Looking back from the distance of over eighty years there are already myths grown up around Suffolk's part in the war. There is a story of an alleged attempted invasion at the tiny fishing hamlet of Shingle Street. This was supposedly repelled by the lighting of a petrol barrier in the sea, which resulted in the washing up of many burnt enemy bodies. There is not a shred of evidence to support the story, but care must be taken because refutation of it can cause great anger among Suffolk locals.

This is a landscape exceptionally rich in folklore: Black Shug, the dog of evil omens, the eerie tales of M R James, the ghosts Anglo-Saxon warriors that inspired Edith Pretty to have Sutton Hoo dug. The landscape somehow elicits a belief in the supernatural.

The building of coastal defences was accelerated in reaction to the blitzkrieg and the terrifying speed with which the German forces pushed through Western Europe and captured France. The English government feared that we were next, and the coast of East Anglia was one of the obvious invasion places. It was not alone in being fortified, however, all the coastlines facing east and south were deemed to be vulnerable.

The planning for the defences came from the very top. The man who took charge in May 1940 was General Sir Edmund Ironside, Commander-in-Chief, home forces. His plans sought to implement a coastal crust to hold up invaders on the beaches, with inland stop lines to stop them moving too fast. Nodal points on significant roads were intended to act as bottlenecks with a final pitched battle envisaged using reservists. It is to his brief tenure that we owe the construction of the ubiquitous concrete pillboxes.

Ironside was replaced as C-in-C of Home Forces in July 1940, his plans having not found favour with other senior army officers or with Churchill. He was succeeded by Lieutenant-General Sir Alan Brooke, who held this position until December 1941. He reconfigured the coastal defences, after his own plans, placing much more emphasis on the role of mobile forces and less on built defences. He particularly disliked the inland pillboxes and the stop lines of Ironside's plans.

All the coastal landscapes had their own features and so in practice the central plans issued from the war office were customized by local commanders. The exact implementations have to be discovered through archaeology rather than paperwork (details were only recorded in personal papers and diaries) – and there is a huge physical and cultural legacy to explore.

So how was the coastal 'crust' implemented in Suffolk? The topography had spurs of solid land projecting through marshlands. If gun emplacements and defences could be concentrated on the spurs then the marshes in between could be made very inhospitable to invading troops by flooding them. The beaches themselves were protected by a variety of structures, all aimed at preventing the landing of troops and mechanized support. There were dragon's teeth, there were concrete blocks, there were metal 'bedsteads'. And there were miles and miles of barbed wire. They made inland waterways unnavigable by grounding ferries and sinking old fishing boats.

Many of the pillboxes still survive (they tended to be rectangular in this part of the world). If you have ever looked at a pillbox and wondered how on earth it was intended to help, this might be because you are only looking at part of the structure. Pillboxes went together with trenches and external gun emplacements, all trace of which has since vanished. Some of the pillboxes were camouflaged. Lowestoft had one that

masqueraded as a beachfront ice cream shop. (It should be noted that some of the contemporary troops regarded pillboxes as death traps – one engineer whose job it was to blow up Blythburgh bridge in the event of invasion noted as much in his diary.)

How did the locals cope with all these



changes to their environment, when they suddenly found themselves occupants of a military landscape? If you just go by the central plan you'd believe that fishermen were denied access to their means of making a living and that you'd never find a child building a sandcastle. Was this not like the Nazis building the Atlantic wall at the other side of the channel? Although structurally similar, the experience was very different. The British Army were not a hostile, occupying force, and the fear of invasion was very real. It is easy for us to look back, through our 'Dad's Army' lenses, knowing that the invasion never materialized, but we should not underestimate the worry and distress at what might happen.

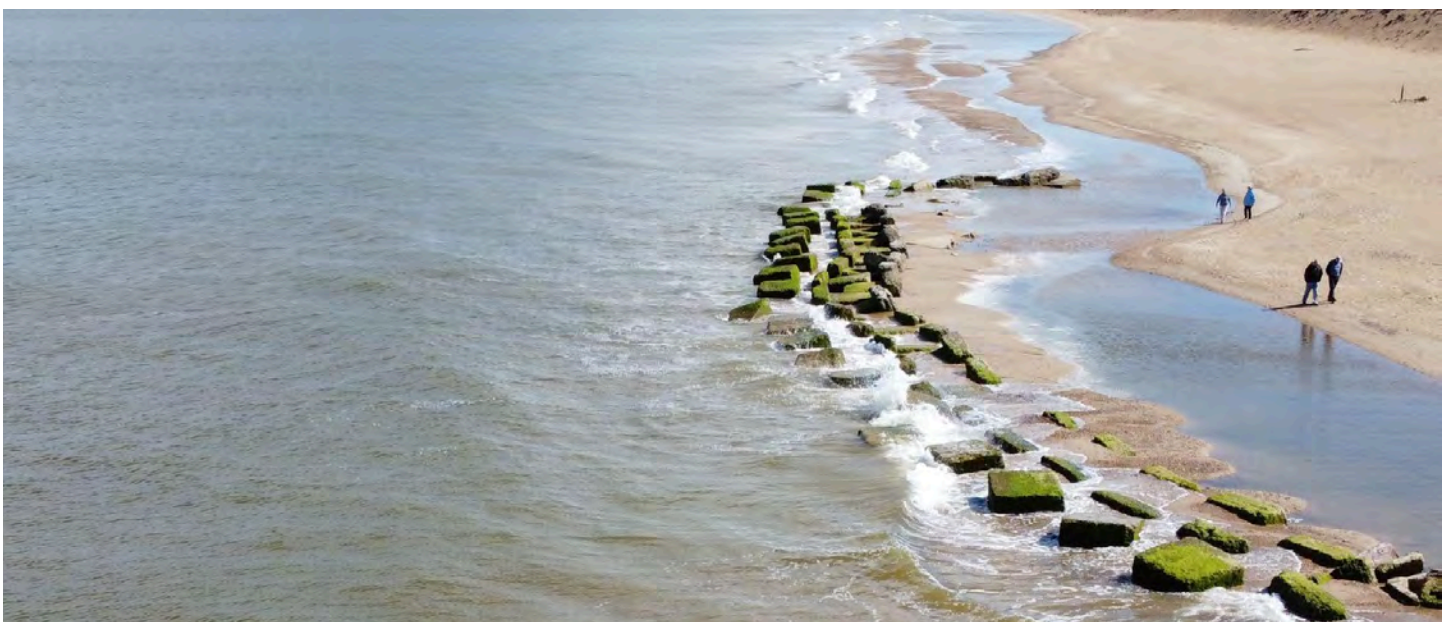
We should also observe that compromises were made along the way. Fishermen were still able to land their catches at certain points and the lifeboat could still launch. Non-strategic beaches were available for the recreation of locals and off-duty soldiers. Land earmarked for flooding was left for grazing (with the recognition that it would be flooded if it became necessary) and anti-tank ditches that ran straight as an arrow over heathland suddenly started following existing field boundaries as they came inland. Local builders had as much work as they could cope with. People who stayed within the

militarized environment and the danger of invasion, felt somehow superior to their neighbours who had removed themselves to 'safety'.

It should also be remembered that seaside residents of Suffolk had, to some extent, seen it all before. There had been invasion threats during the first world war, and the Napoleonic wars had seen the construction of the Martello towers. There had even been previous legends of the mutilated bodies of would-be invaders washing ashore, this time as a result of an attempted invasion by the low countries in the thirteenth century.

When the threat had gone and the war was over, the fortifications began to be removed. But it did not happen overnight and the constructions were seen as having become part of the structure, so beaches seemed 'bald' without them. Much remains for visitors to the area to explore today. Some of the more permanent structures are still visible, and recent erosion of beaches has revealed even more. Meanwhile, attention is turning to the Norfolk coastline as the next subject of study.

Mandy de Belin



Window into the Neolithic: analyzing landscape patterns through a Medieval lens

Carol Gurnham

Our first supporting speaker acknowledged that she had been inspired by Hoskins to study the landscape (an experience that many of us share). More directly, Carol's project has been inspired by the mysteriously missing long barrows of Leicestershire and Rutland.

The construction of early Neolithic long barrows coincided with the emergence of farming in Britain and date from around 4000-3500BCE. Barrows are long mounds of earth, turf, timber and/or stone, and often contain chambers and burials. There are around 500 such barrows known about in Britain and Ireland, but there seem to be absolutely none in Leicestershire and Rutland. This lack despite the fact that the area shares basic geology with the contiguous Cotswolds and Lincolnshire wolds, which both have long barrows a-plenty.

Carol's project is taking existing historical and archaeological research into the medieval landscapes of this area, and investigating whether they contain hidden information about the neolithic landscapes of Leicestershire and Rutland. There are also numerous scheduled medieval monuments that are yet to be fully investigated, might they have earlier antecedents?

The destruction of earlier features through modern intensive ploughing might be one explanation of the mystery of the missing barrows, but there is plenty of surviving ridge-and-furrow to be found. Could these medieval remnants offer the opportunity to model earlier ritual and settlement landscapes. The intended result is the production of GIS output with multiple layers.

So how to you use something that we have plenty of to find out about something that we have none of? It starts with the premise that the medieval open field systems would have been based around what was already there. These field patterns had great longevity, do they contain information about the medieval perception of neolithic monuments? For

example, might they have used such landscape features as boundary markers? Might the disappeared barrows be represented in placenames?

The project draws on the work of Leicestershire and Rutland archaeologist Robert 'Fred' Hartley. He has produced many hand-drawn schematics of surviving historic features in the landscapes of the two counties. These are being digitized and added to with lidar plottings. The search is for anomalies, where, for example, field systems do not follow the topology of the landscape. There are existing examples of the behaviour of ridge-and-furrow features in the vicinity of prehistoric monuments. So far as placename evidence is concerned, the project is concentrating on names that contain elements such as 'holmr', 'hlaw', and 'haugr', with the aim of producing 'heatmaps' that track usage of these elements.

Carol has also undertaken fieldwork to help her understand the siting of such barrows. Looking at the location of these monuments in diverse areas such as Ireland, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, and the Isle of Wight has helped to get 'her eye in' as to sizes and shapes and location in relation to field systems. The project also has scope for community engagement, in particular utilizing surveys by amateur archaeologists.

Mandy de Belin

'Utensils of my Trade': Women's paid work and businesses in Warwickshire towns 1660-1740

Julie Chamberlain

The subject of Julie Chamberlain's paper was women's work, and specifically the role of women in paid work and in businesses in the Warwickshire towns of Birmingham, Coventry, Stratford upon Avon, and Warwick in the years between 1660 and 1740.

One of the first challenges of undertaking such a project is the absence of women from the written sources. Women didn't tend to appear in town records, except as a problem. One

question posed by the research is was there a 'golden age' for female employment before the sixteenth century that was eroded by the development of capitalism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries?

Julie was looking at many traditionally male occupations such as blacksmith, whitesmith, pewterer, saddler, and baker, and found women who ran independent businesses for many years. Many were widows found to be continuing in work when they weren't financially constrained to do so; there was the possibility that they carried on in order to ensure the longevity of the family in that trade. There was also the question of how far women were involved in the physical labour of these crafts and industries, and how much they took more of an administrative role in running the business. She was using wills and inventories to find evidence of women owning, and bequeathing the tools of their trades.

Julie found evidence that women were doing the hot and heavy work; there were examples of women bequeathing the tools of their trade to other women. She also found evidence of them 'bridging the gap'. Looking at the Bakers companies of Coventry, she found seven families who continued from the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries. Women held roles over a long period. She also quoted the example of the Bewley family of plumbers in Coventry. Four women, by staying in work, kept the family business going for over 100 years, even becoming guild members.

How important were women such as these to the economic health of a town? They held no official positions; there were generally no women in positions of authority. One exception to this was Stratford upon Avon where in the years 1673, 1682, and 1683 women served as wardens. Sometimes women took on the responsibilities of such posts without the having the actual titles. Why was Stratford different? It was smaller than the other towns, barely growing in population during this period, and males had to take on many roles. Necessity might have made the appointment of females more palatable.

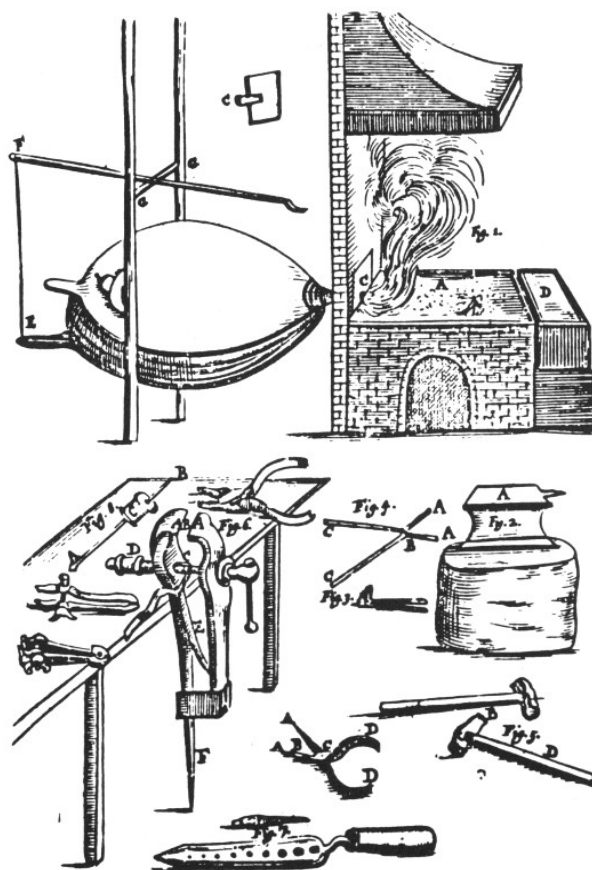
Julie also found evidence of spinsters as well as widows running businesses and becoming involved in the fabric of towns. In Coventry a single female ran an ironmongers for 32 years after her father's death.

There is much evidence of women being involved in the building trades. Widows ran companies supplying bricks in all four of the study towns. There are records of them delivering bricks for building works. A female-owned business supplied the sand, gravel, and building stones required to repair Stratford bridge. (Such companies did not require apprenticed workers, just labourers.) In Warwick castle between 1731-1734, the widow Dunkley was carrying out works.

As well as the traditionally male businesses there was also much evidence of women's involvement in the usual female occupations such as food, teaching, and nursing. All in all there is a great amount of evidence concerning the very active roles that women played in the economies of these Warwickshire towns across the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Mandy de Belin

Sharp-eyed readers of last year's Newsletter will remember Julie's report on her trip to the archives after being made an award from the Hoskins-Duffield fund.



Professor Phil Batman Family History Prize

The Professor Phil Batman Family History Prize is awarded annually for outstanding work on any aspect of the history of the family undertaken at any UK University or Higher Education Institution. There are undergraduate and postgraduate categories. Here are the winners of the 2025 prize.

Undergraduate winner: *From 'walking out' to 'going steady': girlhood and the Americanisation of dating rituals in Liverpool and Melbourne, c. 1950-1970*

Harriet Bee

On a warm Melbourne night in 1951, teenagers crowd around a jukebox in a milk bar, sipping milkshakes in Levi jeans. Across the world in Liverpool, young couples sway under a ballroom chandelier to the same Nat King Cole song drifting from the speakers. The music was the same. The dreams were similar. But the lived experience of young women in both cities fundamentally diverged.

Between 1950 and 1970, American media fundamentally transformed how teenage girls in both cities understood, imagined, and practised romance. Yet Americanisation was neither

uniform nor all-encompassing. Filtered through the distinct class structures, economic conditions, and political anxieties of each city, it produced diverging and locally rooted expressions of dating and desire - a cultural template adopted, adapted, and sometimes resisted by the city's youth.

Drawing on oral testimonies from the Australian Generations Project and the Mass Observation Archive, alongside teenage magazines, newspapers, and psychological studies, the research traces the lived experience of girls

navigating these shifts across three stages of romantic experience and learning: the bedroom, the date, and the longer arc of relationships and marriage.

Before the date even began, American culture already did much to influence young women's ideas about love. The bedroom - through transistor radios, magazines, and Elvis merchandise - became the primary site of romantic education for teenage girls, reshaping emotional expectations of love into something intensely personal and consumer-mediated. In Liverpool, however, post-war unemployment and working-class solidarity meant the consumer model underpinning these scripts was only ever partially

achievable.

When young women moved from the bedroom to the wider world, American influence followed. Melbourne's suburban car culture naturally absorbed the drive-in cinema, creating



commercially mediated spaces where romance and spending became inseparable. Liverpool's teenagers, dating on buses and in greasy spoon cafes, arrived at similar aspirations by different routes - adapting rather than wholesale adopting the American model, and preserving a distinctly local identity in the process.

At the heart of the period, however, lies a paradox. The same magazines encouraging girls to 'play the field' simultaneously ran

bride-of-the-month features and policed sexual freedom. In Melbourne, Cold War anxieties gave this contradiction official force. In Liverpool, comparatively progressive Catholic clergy and a more teen-centred approach to sex education created a somewhat freer, if still constrained, environment.

By foregrounding women's voices throughout, this research argues that teenage girls were active agents in cultural change - adopting, resisting, and adapting American influence through the everyday choices they made in their romantic lives

Postgraduate winner: ***Creative Historical Practice and Family Archiving: Bereavement, Commemoration and Recovering Lost Memories***

Kate Wilcox

My great aunt May was killed aged 23 in October 1945, when the plane she was travelling on was lost over the Mediterranean. She had been home on leave after the end of the war and was returning to her clerical job at Allied Force Headquarters near Naples. Her family rarely spoke of her after her death, and my grandfather, her only brother, died relatively young. My mother was left feeling her absence and longing to know more.

In 2022 my mother read an account of the accident and made some enquiries. This led to her being put in touch with the family of May's fiancé, who we had not previously known about. His family generously shared some documents. One was a fifty-page letter written to him by May in October 1944, vividly describing the leave she was spending with her brother in Rome, and giving a powerful sense of her personality. Other items were extracts from her fiancé's diary covering the time of her disappearance, and a letter written by May's mother in the aftermath of the accident.

My MA project experimented with creative historical practice to capture the impact of these discoveries on May's family and recover further details of her life. My hope was to move the focus of the family's memory away from her tragic death and towards a celebration of her life. This was achieved through two creative outputs: a visual

research diary and a video involving family members, whose relationship to each other matched that of the original writers, reading the three sources written by May, her fiancé and mother. The creative outputs captured multiple voices, family members past and present, and in doing so rebuilt lost memories and created a commemorative record.

An accompanying essay analysed these creative outputs in the context of recent historical work on family collecting and memory, bereavement and commemoration, historians writing about their own family history, and subjectivity and empathy in historical research. It reflected on how expansive methodologies in research and storytelling methodologies can construct and disseminate history in ways that are harder using conventional methods.

History of place featured heavily, as I explored locations where May had been and where she is named on memorials. I was able to piece together aspects of her young life in Bermondsey, south London, and her clerical work in the Alaska fur factory there. At Southwark archives I read vivid accounts in staff magazines of a dance and a sports day that she attended. I visited Dunblane hydropathic hotel where she had trained in January 1944 before being posted to Italy later that year. I explored Second World War Rome through guidebooks and maps produced for soldiers based there. My family travelled to the Brookwood Memorial and Lincoln International Bomber Command Centre, where she is commemorated.

I wrote about the variety of sources and repositories where information has survived, and their emotional impact. They ranged from personal narratives to official sources, found in informal family collections and formal archives. I thought about the way that objects evolve in meaning as they pass through generations. The creative outputs assembled a story of family loss alongside an account of my great aunt's life. Although my mother had always regretted the absence of memories and stories about May passed directly down in the family, we were able to understand more of the emotions of past family members that can be glimpsed through their carefully captioned photo albums and other items kept.



Perhaps you know
 who I'm looking for,
 I've been looking for
 him for a long time
 and I'm sure you
 know who I'm looking
 for. I've been looking
 for him for a long time
 and I'm sure you know
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 know who I'm looking for.

A little learning is a dangerous thing; Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring

Alexander Pope, 1688 – 1744

John Parker brings a bit of Pope into our lives

I live a little over a mile away from the site of Alexander Pope's house in Cross Deep, Twickenham, where he lived from 1719 until his death in 1744. The money made from his translation of Homer allowed Pope to build his house and create his famous grotto and gardens. During the excavation of the grotto the discovery of a spring of water led Pope to say, "Were it to have nymphs as well – it would be complete in everything." The original house was demolished in 1808 by Baroness Howe of Langar who built her own house next to the site. Thomas Young, a tea merchant, came into possession of that property in 1842 and had a "Tudor Gothic" house built there which in 1919 became St. Catherine's Convent School and since 2010 has been occupied by Radnor House Independent School. All that remains of the original house is Pope's Grotto which was restored and is open to the public for about 30 weekends a year through The Pope's Grotto Preservation Trust. His famous landscaped gardens comprising some five acres of land which included a Theatre, an Arcade, a Bowling Green and a Grove are now covered by the site of some housing and a girls' school.

Pope was born in London in 1688. His father was a successful linen merchant based in The Strand and the family were Catholic, which meant that they were subject to the Test Acts that prohibited Catholics from attending public schools or a university, voting, or holding public office. Catholics were also banned from living within ten miles of Whitehall. Throughout most of his life, he suffered from tuberculosis of the spine that stunted his growth (to only 4' 6") and left him with a severe hunchback and debilitating headaches.

He appears to have been largely self-taught and learned French, Italian, Latin, and Greek in this way. All his life he imitated the works of classical authors such as Homer, Virgil, Horace, Quintilian, and Ovid, who also provided him with the poetic styles which he would subsequently employ.

Pope's early published poems, beginning with *Pastorals* in 1709 were followed by *An Essay on Criticism* in 1711 which contains a range of literary criticism and advice, and represents many of the chief ideals of Pope's age. These works earned him widespread fame and introduced him to the great figures of the day including Swift, Steele, and Addison. The brilliantly polished epigrams contained in *An Essay on Criticism* ("A little learning is a dangerous thing," "To err is human, to forgive, divine," and "For fools rush in where angels fear to tread"), have become famous quotations and some observers have said that no authors except Shakespeare and Milton have given to the English language so many quotable lines and phrases as Pope.

During his friendship with Addison he contributed to the play *Cato*, as well as writing for *The Guardian* and *The Spectator*. In 1713 his poem *Windsor Forest* – "Thy forests, Windsor! and thy green retreats" - was published to more acclaim. In 1717 he also collaborated with John Gay and John Arbuthnot (although Gay was the principal author) in *Three Hours After Marriage* which was written in the style of a restoration comedy and is best described as a satirical farce.

Pope's most famous poem is probably *The Rape of the Lock*, first published in 1712, in which he satirises the "beau-monde" of the

18th-century. Johnson called it “the most exquisite example of ludicrous poetry”. The revised and extended version of the poem focuses more on the obsession with trivial things which Pope sees as dominating contemporary society. In 1715 he published *The Temple of Fame* directly inspired by Chaucer's fourteenth-century poem *The House of Fame* and, like Chaucer's original version, taking the form of a dream vision. *Eloisa to Abelard* was published in 1717 and was based on the well-known medieval story of Héloïse d'Argenteuil's illicit love for, and secret marriage to, her teacher Peter Abelard. *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady*, also called *Verses to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady*, is a poem in heroic couplets first published in 1717. Its subject is an unnamed woman who committed suicide due to loving “too well.” *Peri Bathous, Or the Art of Sinking in Poetry* is a short essay published in 1728 with the aim of ridiculing contemporary poets. The work is a prose parody of *Peri Hupsous* (On the Sublime) attributed to the 1st century AD Greek scholar Longinus.



The Dunciad is a mock-heroic, narrative poem published in three different versions at different times from 1728 to 1743. The poem celebrates a goddess, Dulness, and the progress of her servants as they bring poor taste, decay and mediocrity to the Kingdom of Great Britain. The poem is a thinly veiled expression of his political views and his criticism of the Whig ministry of Robert Walpole and the court of George II. His satires created such animosity that Pope carried pistols when he walked his large dog in Twickenham. Alongside the political attack Pope also launched a cultural attack on those who write for pay. Pope was one of the earliest poets

to make his living solely by writing, so it is not the professional author, but the mercenary author that Pope derided. He attacked writers who perform for money alone and who do not believe in what they are doing.

Moral Essays (also known as *Epistles to Several Persons*) is a series of four poems on ethical subjects published between 1731 and 1735. Pope published *An Essay on Man* in 1733–1734 as an effort to rationalize or “vindicate the ways of God to man”. In America

he was the most frequently cited author by the founding generation and even today in the USA Pope is cited second only to Shakespeare.

An Essay on Man is concerned with the natural order God has decreed for man. More than any other work, it popularized optimistic philosophy throughout England and the rest of Europe and had a particular appeal to the American founding generation for whom Pope presented an image of the universe as a well-integrated machine subject to natural laws established by God. According to Pope, “Order is

Heaven's first law.” Pope argued that if they wanted to be happy humans must accept their position in the “Great Chain of Being” somehow between angels and beasts, and they must realize that “Whatever is, is Right.” Voltaire called the *Essay on Man* “the most beautiful, the most useful, the most sublime didactic poem ever written in any language,” while Rousseau said that it “softens my ills and brings me patience.”

One of Pope's frequently cited couplets deals with constitution making, “For forms of

government let fools contest, Whate'er is best administered is best." In 1776 John Adams ridiculed this couplet in his *Thoughts on Government* believing that it "flattered tyrants too much." According to Adams, "Nothing can be more fallacious than this. But poets read history to collect flowers, not fruits; they attend to fanciful images, not the effects of social institutions. Nothing is more certain, from the history of nations and the nature of man, than that some forms of government are better fitted for being well administered than others." Alexander Hamilton, in *The Federalist* also quoted the couplet on forms of government saying, "though we cannot acquiesce in the political heresy of the poet, . . . yet we may safely pronounce, that the true test of a good government is its aptitude and tendency to produce a good administration."

The *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* is a poetic satire addressed to Pope's friend John Arbuthnot. It was first published in 1735 but written in 1734 when Pope learned that Arbuthnot was dying. Pope described it as a memorial of their friendship and it is his most directly autobiographical work in which he defends his practice in the genre of satire and attacks those who had been his opponents and rivals throughout his career.

The Imitations of Horace was written between 1733 and 1738 in the style of Horace and as a satire of life under George II, especially with regards to what Pope saw as the corruption stemming from Walpole's influence and the general lack of artistic taste.

His greatest labour was in the work of translating the Greek epics. He announced his intentions in 1713 and published the first volume, containing the part of the Iliad, in 1715. The Iliad was completed in six volumes in 1720. The work of translating the Odyssey was shared with William Broome, who had contributed notes to the Iliad, and Elijah Fenton. The work earned Pope about £10,000 and he claimed that, thanks to Homer, he could "...live and thrive, Indebted to no Prince or Peer alive." Pope offered Homer less as an accurate translation but more in the style of heroic poems as his readers would have understood them and in the

way that he felt sure Homer would have written them had he lived in early 18th-century England. Between 1723 and 1725 he also produced *The Works of Shakespear* in six volumes.

With the emergence of new poets and new literary fashions Pope's reputation gradually declined. Joseph Warton in *An essay on the genius and writings of Pope* first published in 1782 claimed that Pope's style was not the most excellent form of the art. The Romantic Movement of the early 19th-century England was more ambivalent about his work. Byron identified Pope as one of his chief influences, but Wordsworth found Pope's style too decadent to represent the human condition. George Gilfillan in an 1856 study called *The Poetical Works of Alexander Pope* described Pope's talent "a rose peering into the summer air, fine, rather than powerful".

Samuel Johnson noted in his article in *The Lives of the English Poets* that it would be useless to attempt to write better couplets than Pope had produced, however he suggested too that new poets would emphasize new images and new sentiments, and by the early nineteenth century the English Romantics had, with a few notable exceptions, come to look upon him as a brilliant author whose work unfortunately not only reflected but exemplified the deadening artificiality of his age. However, he was never without supporters like Isaac D'Israeli (writer, scholar and the father of prime minister Benjamin Disraeli) who defended *The Rape of the Lock* by insisting that the best poetry reflected the spirit of the age that had produced it, and that, judged by that standard, the poem was a work of genius.

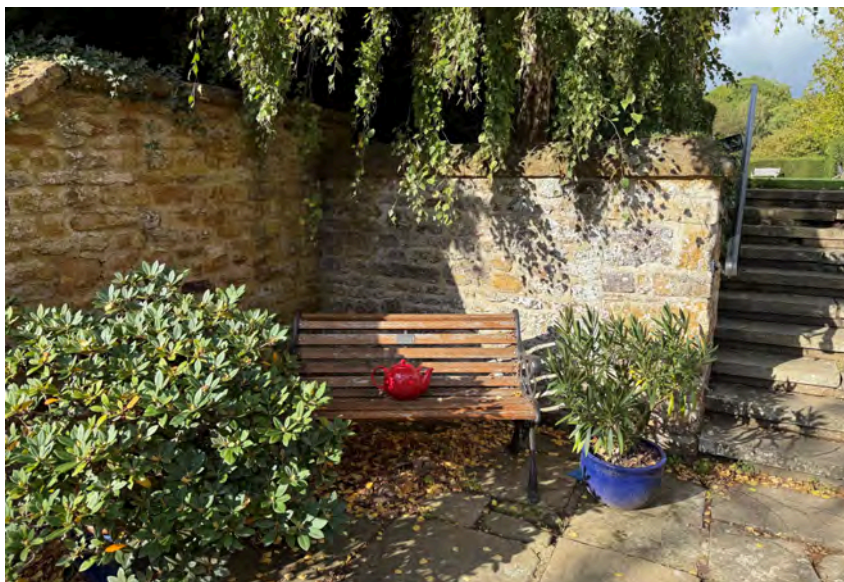
Matthew Arnold wrote that Pope's poetry lacked seriousness, Lytton Strachey called him a "fiendishly clever and spiteful monkey" and Oscar Wilde offered the opinion that "There are two ways of disliking poetry. One is not to like it, and the other is to read Pope". However, T. S. Eliot paid homage to Pope in *The Fire Sermon* and Ezra Pound paid him a greater tribute still when he said, "you cannot parody Pope unless you can write better verse than Pope - and you cannot".

Pope's reputation revived in the 20th century. His work was full of references to the people and places of his time which aided people's understanding of the past. The post-war period stressed the power of Pope's poetry, recognising that Pope's immersion in classical culture lent depth to his poetry.

Pope was acknowledged to be the first "professional" poet and the first English poet to enjoy contemporary fame in France, Italy and throughout Europe and to see widespread

translations of his poems. He wrote little after 1738 and died at the age of 56 in 1744. He is buried in St. Mary's Church in Twickenham, under a stone slab engraved simply with the letter P, near a bronze memorial plate (added later), joining his mother Edith Pope who had been buried in the church in 1733.

Attendees of this year's Hoskins Day may have noticed that the giant red teapot from our Salisbury Road days was up for adoption. I am happy to report that it has found a lovely new home at Thornby Hall, where it is being pressed into service to provide cuppas for visiting groups. Here are some shots of it happy in its new surroundings.



Centre Seminars

2025/26 saw a rather disrupted seminar programme, but here are some reports of the seminars that went ahead:

Historian of UK Black History: Peter Fryer and 'Staying Power' Gaverne

Bennett, PhD Researcher, University of Leicester. 23 October 2025.

From Nation to Local: re-discovering England's places through "A history of England in 25 poems" Catherine Clarke,

Director of the Centre for the History of People, Place and Community, IHR. 28th November 2025.

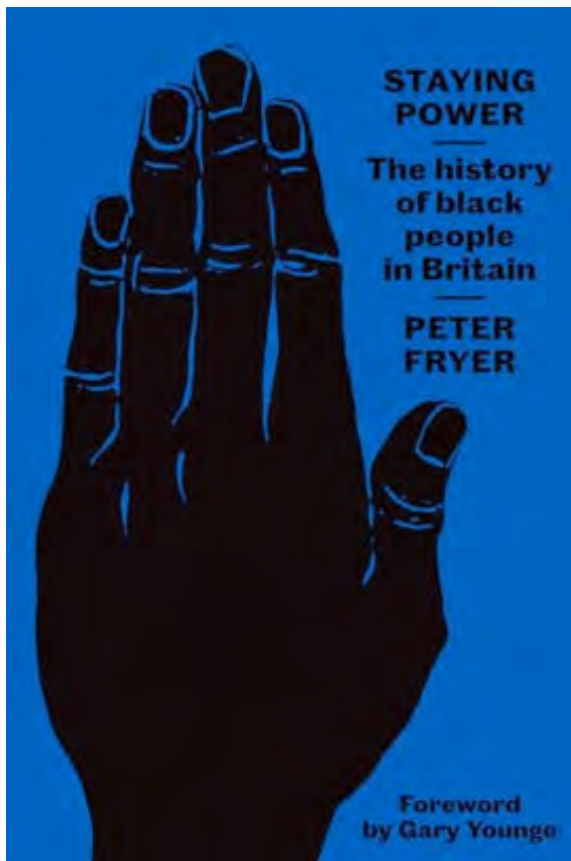
During the autumn term, we heard from two speakers who encouraged us to take a long view of English/British history. This may seem like a rather tenuous link - Fryer's book is a mastery of journalistic research with studious references whilst Clarke uses extracts from poems to set the context for her discussions. What unites them is that both take a long view and move from the small to the

large – from individuals and local places to enduring national historical themes.

Gaverne Bennett discussed the motive for and the impact of Peter Fryer's 1984 book *Staying Power: the history of Black People in Britain* (Pluto, 1984). Peter Fryer, a journalist, was an ardent Communist who broke from the Party after witnessing events in Hungary in 1956. He reported on the arrival of 492 Jamaicans at Tilbury on the Empire Windrush in 1948 and went on to spend 15 years researching the presence of Black people and their communities in Britain, from the Roman period to the present: from black soldiers on guard on Hadrian's wall to the explosive rebellions of black and white young people in cities across England in 1981.

History taught in British schools in the nineteen-eighties did not explore the presence of black people in the country in historical times. Fryer set out to show that black people were a part of the nation's history and that you cannot understand the nation's history if you don't understand the experience of the black people. Some historians said it was not feasible to research the history of black people in Britain as they were underrepresented or not identified as black people in historical sources but Fryer applied his journalistic skills to do just that.

Fryer argued that historians should look at the British black experience, at black British history and at black identities in Britain - up to then the focus had been on the USA and West Indies. During the 1960s, some blacks living in Britain identified with the black experience in the USA, copying the behaviours and adopting the political views of American groups in groups such as the British Black Panthers. The 1970s saw the emergence of the Pan-Africanism movement but this still did not recognise a distinctive British experience. By the 1980s, the concept of "being black" was political – anyone who experienced colonialism, slavery or other oppression was "black", a view promoted by leaders such as Darcus Howe. This politicisation



led to the riots of the 1980s which broke the pattern of race relations in Britain, as black and white people came together to protest. It was also the time when people realised there were differences between black communities and that you could be born in a different place, even if of the same heritage.

'*Staying Power*' was published at a significant time, just after the race riots - a powerful book appearing at the right moment which helped to make sense of the things that had happened. Fryer showed that Black history is more than the history of slavery and that there is longevity of black communities in Britain. Black people were not unseen, passive in their communities. There was some backlash from the black community at the time to what was a white man writing about black history. But he got a lot of support from the Black Cultural Archives. There was a strong sense that he knew what he was talking about and that his book was thoroughly researched, with multiple citations and supporting notes.

Bennett's enthusiasm for Fryer's work shone through his talk. He agrees that '*Staying Power*' is not a gentle read but it remains relevant today and if you want to read one book about black British history, read this one.

Catherine Clarke opened her talk by asking how should we tell stories of England and Englishness? She argues that, like the Victoria County Histories, we should start with the local, with the small scale and work up to national themes and grand narratives. Local history is the only place we can understand the abstract idea of 'England'.

Clarke starts each of her 25 chapters with an extract from a poem which sets the context for discussion and opens a window into the past. She takes the long view, starting in the eighth-century with Bede's tale of 'Caedmon's Hymn' and the origin story of the English people then works through the centuries to 2022 with a reflective look back over the intervening centuries, inspired by Kunial's "The Groundsman". Clarke explained that she consciously selected diverse voices - men and women of all colours, old and young, elite and the poor, and the marginalised with links to local places across England. She set out to explore threads of nostalgia, greatness and whimsy in

poems that can be radical, comic, perverse, ironic and satirical.



Some poems are microhistories like 'Adlestrop' written in 1915, published in 1917 after the poet, Edward Thomas, was killed. A brief halt at a train station opens up to challenge the wave of patriotism sweeping England during the Great War. Some are rooted in place – the watery landscape of Malden; the fire of London; the North of England. Barrett Browning's poem is one of the most moving as it recounts the 1838 Barnsley pit disaster which killed 26 children aged 7 to 17 years, a local event which led to national outrage, national inquiry and statutory reform.

Karen Donegani

'Mine goods are mine own'. Exploring law and political identity in an Elizabethan local community

Jonathan Healey, Associate Professor in Social History and Director of Studies in Social and Local History, University of Oxford. 5th February 2026.

Dr Healey is researching the mechanisms and processes of the Elizabethan court of the Star Chamber, looking at how the court was used to monitor the aims of the government and how the government presented itself to the people. In this talk he presented a micro-history of one Star Chamber case prompted by an "Information of the Attorney" – a bill presented to the court by the Attorney General, which illustrates the concerns and interests of the government of the day. This process was available to the Attorney General because the Star Chamber adopted a more flexible approach to the law and considered prosecutions despite the absence of

statute law. The source materials for this study are the accounts of John Howarde (c.1571-1631), an English barrister of the Inner Temple, who attended the Star Chamber during the period 1593-1609 and recorded verbatim the outcomes of cases, and the records of Elizabethan Star Chamber recently re-catalogued by the TNA.

John Mison or Myson, a landowner and yeoman of South Wraxall, part of Bradford on Avon parish, Bradford, Wiltshire was charged¹, in the Star Chamber by the Attorney General (Edward Coke) for refusing to bring his grain to market, issuing seditious words and advocating that the government had no right to interfere with his trade. Buchanan-Sharp, in his study of the grain trade², concluded that the Attorney General's

case against Mison was an example of government prosecutions relating to enclosure, depopulation and the grain trade. He portrays Mison as a 'forward thinker' who shared his views with many farmers in Norfolk and Kent who took a free-market, capitalist view of how the grain trade should work, views which did eventually replace the paternalistic approach to the grain market.

The 1590s were the "Nasty Nineties" with social uprisings including Kett's Rebellion in Norfolk and revolts in Oxfordshire. The state responded by reforming support for the poor and prosecuting depopulators but also by prosecuting leaders of the revolts. Through local magistrates, the state tried to actively manage the grain market with 'Grain orders' issued by

the Privy Council. In South Wiltshire, the local magistrates ordered grain to be brought to market in response to local protests against high prices during which a crowd of 15 or so women attacked a man carrying grain

in Bradford on Avon which is just to the East of Bath and on the route to Bristol and Ireland.

Grain riots were about empty barns and barns about to be emptied and sold. Given its location, a South Wraxall farmer could sell his grain to Wiltshire buyers or sell to Bath, to Somerset or wider afield. The Wiltshire JPs ordered Mison to sell his corn in Bradford upon Avon but he refused and decided to sell out-of-county. His wife was already selling corn to people from Somerset "at her gate" and refused to sell, at a reduced price, to the poor people of Bradford.

So why did this local magistrate's court case end up in the Star Chamber? The case appears to be about corn but Mison raised a



Misons Farmhouse, Lower Wraxall. Grade II listed farmhouse dated 1576. Graffiti on walls reads 'GOD SAVE OUR QUEEN ELIZABETH 1575 JOHN MISON AN/ELIN HIS WIFE.'

©David Lovell. Source: Historic England Archive.

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1180409>

¹ <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C5389955>

² *Famine and Scarcity in Late Medieval and Early Modern*

England: The Regulation of Grain Marketing, 1256-1631 by Buchanan Sharp. Cambridge University Press, 2016. 978-1316599327.

constitutional debate in his defence in front of the magistrate - he argued for a market economy over the moral economy of the state. He was a well-to-do yeoman stirring political activism and promoting resistance to the prosecution of laws not on the statute book that affected his property.

Why did this specific case attract the attention of the Attorney General? Mison had a track record with the Bradford magistrates who may have happily communicated their concerns about Mison to the Attorney General. The Justices had previously told Mison he had to take in a poor child from Bradford as an apprentice but Mison objected and became an annoyance to the magistrates. Taking in a parish apprentice was not a requirement of statute law but a Poor Law provision, issued by the Privy Council, as was the obligation to sell corn locally at reduced rates. Mison objected to the order and argued that laws should be made by Parliament not by royal prerogative, an argument still rumbling with the raising of Ship Money in the 1630s.

But Mison was also very litigious and unpopular with his fellow villagers. His tenants raised complaints about him, saying he is an ungodly,

annoying, fighting, womaniser, busybody and 'maker of discord'. Prior to the Star Chamber case, he had already been imprisoned by the Privy Council for religious radicalism and sued for debt by the Minister of Bradford. Local people, reputedly Puritans, testified against him in court cases, though it may have been the result of a dispute over a tenement rather than religious views which fuelled these objections.

This microhistory of John Mison's case in the Star Chamber shows yeomen in the 1590s formulated arguments around the need for statute law and held constitutional ideas about property. It also demonstrates how the state, via the magistrates' courts, monitored local disputes. This court case is especially interesting as it was brought by the Attorney General in response to challenges to Privy Council orders, orders which were later moved onto the statute books. A dispute illustrating a localised ideological link to state politics.

Karen Donegani

Circles of resistance: taking Wales to Greenham and carrying Greenham back again

Dr Elaine Titcombe, Honorary Visiting Fellow, Centre for Regional and Local History, University of Leicester. 27th February 2026.

Dr Titcombe began her talk by describing the growing sense of uncertainty in rural Wales during the early 1980s. Young people were leaving; services were shrinking; coal mines were closed; and there was a feeling that rural Wales was being left behind. English people were moving in, many from large cities, bringing alternative political ideas and reshaping local networks as conversations moved to new topics like feminism and the environment. At the same time, as part of wider international moves, the signing of the 1981 NATO ratification of nuclear weapons agreement resulted in 109 Cruise missiles located at Greenham Common and Molesworth - a costly and alarming move which seemed a madness to many.

The 1981 'Women for Life on Earth' saw 36 women, 4 men and 4 children in prams walk from Cardiff to RAF Greenham Common in Berkshire to protest against the US decision to site nuclear cruise missiles in Britain and to set up a permanent peace camp – a protest that lasted 19 years. The missiles are no longer there but we still remember the Greenham Common Women's Camp. The march did not appear from nowhere - it was focussed on Wales rather than Greenham Common and was part of larger, deeper protest movement.

In her research, Dr Titcombe is exploring how Greenham Common camp was shaped by Welsh political culture and Welsh communities were reshaped in turn. Her research is focussed on four key strands.

The women

Based on oral histories and conversations with the women involved in the 1981 march to Greenham Common, Dr Titcombe shows how political identities were formed long before the

women went to the camp and notes that many went on to become life-long anti-nuclear campaigners. Most of the organisers of the Women for Life on Earth were newcomers to Wales and active in CND, Trades Councils and other groups. They wanted to protect the environment and the quality of life in rural Wales and held a sense that an English-centric government was threatening Welsh autonomy.

The presence of RAF Brawdy, a USA Research Station (submarine listening post) in Wales made the country a prime target in times of war and became a focus for protest marches. These drew together people from all walks of life and attracted male speakers but gradually women became more prominent in speaking at rallies and organising action. Ann Pettitt spoke at rallies about babies and children, a female viewpoint later criticised by the women at Greenham Common because she reinforced the role of women as seen by men. But Ann said hers was a very powerful viewpoint that should be heard. Some women felt out of step with the earlier protests as they felt the protest movement was patriarchal and not a true women's campaign.

A march to Brawdy organised by the group reaffirmed their protest and showed Welsh communities had a separate identity from the Greenham Common women's group although they drew on their experiences at the Greenham Common camp.

The Rhondda

Across the Rhondda there was a growth in local activism and an expansion of involvement in the Greenham Common protest and in the Miner's Strikes of the 1980s. In November 1981, six women from local rural mining communities women lived on the street for a week – the first political action they had taken and they gained local support and press coverage. By December 1981, as Greenham Common camp numbers dwindled, local women appeared at the Bridgend Bunker, newly strengthened to resist a nuclear strike. They occupied the site and the protest grew as the site engineer concreted the women in! In August 1982, a group of Welsh women arrived at the Greenham Common Camp, tried to occupy the base sentry box and received some of the first custodial sentences.

By December 1982, 30,000 women were involved in the Camp.

In 1983 some of the women went to the USA to present a legal challenge to President Reagan but others felt the Greenham Common protest no longer reflected their lives in the villages. The personal cost of activism impacted marriages and children but, looking back, they still felt they had been able to express themselves, be empowered and make a difference.

Christian pacifism

During the 1981s, the Anglican church opposed the nuclear bunkers in Wales and elsewhere. Many Anglican women formed the protest in religious terms, writing in Welsh and using moral arguments, stepping outside the traditional role of women but their views remained rooted in the respectability of religion and the laws of God.

There was shock at the imprisonment of Anne Francis, a Welsh woman at the Greenham Common camp – her Christian morality was not a sufficient defence. The Welsh women took the moral language of the Greenham Common camp back to their Welsh communities and their message was that militarism threatened everyone. Sian ap Gwyn was still actively campaigning in the 2010s in Llanbedr and many of the women became linked to the Welsh Nationalist movement.

Anti-colonial, pro-Welsh identities

There was a movement in rural Wales to protect and promote chapel life, Welsh identity, cultural rights and local landownership which drew on a deep-rooted Welsh tradition of women as protectors of community and culture. Helen Wyn Thomas was at the Greenham Common camp – she argued that the British military supported colonialist attitudes to Wales resulting in a lack of housing for locals and the loss of the Welsh language. She translated the Greenham Common camp booklet into Welsh and refused to speak English, living in a Welsh language camp. This followed in the deep-rooted Welsh tradition of women as protectors of community and culture.

Karen Donegani



The walk from Cardiff to Greenham Common. © Richard Burton Archives.

<https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/greenham-common-peace-camp-march-15042053>



March from Cardiff to Greenham Common 1981. Crossing the Severn Bridge.

Image: Margery Lewis collection/Glamorgan Archives.

<https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/greenham-common-peace-camp-march-15042053>

Protest and the enclosure of urban public space in England from the late 18th century to the present

Professor Katrina Navickas, Professor of History, University of Hertfordshire. Thursday 26th March

Professor Navickas is a historian of protest, social and political movements and contested spaces in England from the late 18th century to the present day. Her recent publication *Contested Commons. Reclaim the streets – the development of new urban public spaces and protest in England from the Chartists to Stop the City* (Reaktion Books, 2025) tells the long history of policing and legislation against protest in public spaces. For this seminar she focussed on less well-known resistance rather than major protests that make national headlines.



The Chartist Meeting on Kennington Common, 10 April 1848. RCIN 2932464 Royal Collection Trust © His Majesty King Charles III, 2022.

During the nineteenth century, the enclosure of agricultural land and planting of hedges in rural areas was mirrored in urban spaces by the enclosure of public spaces and common land either by enclosure or improvement acts, establishing 'privately owned public spaces' with conditions of use enforced through byelaws, locked gates and, in some cases, security guards. Even wastes along roads were taken from the public domain and adopted by highway authorities. The provision of accessible public space, free from restrictions, was and remains patchy with many open spaces delineated for a

specific use but there is a strong tradition of using public space for public protest.

Kennington Common, now in Lambeth, was frequently used in the eighteenth century for sporting events, especially cricket, and large public gatherings – John Wesley and George Whitefield preached there in 1739. On 10 April 1848, a gathering of around 50,000 people came to the Common to listen to the Irish Chartist speaker Feargus O'Connor. The event was peaceful but the local vicar was enraged by O'Connor's appearance and complained bitterly about the gathering to local authorities. In 1852 the manorial lord and the parish church were allowed to enclose some of the land and the remainder was enclosed soon after. Railings were erected around the common and large gatherings were banned. Kennington Park was opened in 1854, created from part of the previously common land. No protests were held

at the park until the late 20th century when it became venue for Pride and BLM protest marches. Public access rights were raised again in 2020 when some public parks were closed due to fears of overcrowding and assemblies of more than six people and councils banned the public from sitting on park benches as part of COVID-19 restrictions.

One feature of urban planning, perhaps most famously found in London, is the urban residential square. Property developers planned green spaces for the enjoyment not of the general public but of the owners of the new houses. Squares were railed off

with limited access to gate keys and are privately owned and managed. Some town squares such as Paradise Square in Sheffield are owned by local authorities and are subject to specific byelaws.

National public spaces are often the setting for larger public protests. Trafalgar Square was created as part of a 1813 development of the royal estate. Protests were banned but this ban was largely ignored and it was a venue for protest walks and, by 1835, it was "the" place to demonstrate in London. Policing the square was

difficult as it was managed by multiple layers of authority – The Crown Estate, the Commissioner of Woods and Forests, the Metropolitan Board of Works and City of Westminster Council. There was no clear agreement on who should police the square and whether it should be a right of way or a cul-de-sac.

Urban expansion was another reason for the enclosure of urban land including 'accumulation by speculation' by railway or canal companies or local authorities. The Bolton Enclosure Act enabled the expansion of the town and for once public land to be allocated to local gentry, businesses and the well-off.

Some enclosures were consciously made to provide air and recreation as permissible under The Public Parks Act 1846. Land was enclosed for public parks in Manchester and Salford, funded by public subscription. These parks were often tightly controlled spaces with bans on political or social gatherings and locked at night. Laying out a park was a form of speculation – it was part of the land designated to be housing and provided for higher value properties close to a park. Further legislation including the Recreation Grounds Act 1859 and Playing Fields Act 1925 created further spaces that came with byelaws - space for public meetings were usually small and on the edge of the park.

Protests against the loss of public space and imposition of restrictions and byelaws took many forms. In Hyde Park in 1866 protestors pulled down park railings; in 1896 Keir Hardy and the Pankhursts were involved in protest against Manchester Corporation who had bought Boggart Hole Clough, an historically important place for public open air meetings, and banned political meetings; in 1908 socialists held an outdoor meeting at Hillsborough Park, Sheffield in contravention of byelaws; Trafalgar Square saw the events of Bloody Sunday in 1887; and in 1885, the famous open-air socialist street meetings at Dod Street ended in a mass protest after police arrested the speakers. Protests continued into the twentieth century as protestors in Cable St, London in 1936 erected barricades which were not often seen in England, but were more of a French thing. Also in 1936, the residents of Cutteslowe Estate in Oxford marched (armed with pickaxes) to the

newly built Cutteslowe Walls which divided the council estate from private houses - walls not finally demolished until compulsory purchased by the council in 1959.

1968 was a year of protest over restrictions on access to London squares. In Powis Square, Notting Hill a loose alliance of local social activists and residents occupied the private garden square, forcing the local council to purchase the square and turn it into a public park. Grosvenor Square saw political protests linked to wider national campaigns such as Anti-Vietnam War and Nuclear Disarmament. Sometimes national campaigners clashed with local residents over the purpose and objective of protests resulting in layers and complexity in the protest.

However, organised protests were not the only way citizens reclaimed public spaces from local authority restrictions. People devised 'novel practices of communing'. Migrants to cities turned areas of city into commons by using them for communal activities even if against local planners' intentions. Individuals and groups resisted byelaws and land-owners wishes in quiet, often unnoticed ways. New and sometimes radical gatherings used outdoor spaces for 'Monkey walks', preaching, gambling, hawking, sex work, political activity, and gay spaces.

The period 1945-1979 was the apogee of publicly owned public spaces. War damaged spaces were temporarily reclaimed by people displaced by bombs – they squatted, set up junk playgrounds, and took over plotlands. Central government and local authorities acquired land for building New Towns, land for NHS hospitals and council-owned shopping centres. Manchester City Council owned around 60% of land in the centre of the city and Nottingham City Council owned 55% of Nottingham.

Karen Donegani

'The Seekrits of Sewidge': the map evidence 1870-1930

Dr Richard Jones, Associate Professor, Centre for Regional and Local History, University of Leicester. 20th March 2026.

Acquiring land, designing, building, expanding, maintaining and exploiting a sewage farm required detailed and up-to-date maps and plans. In this seminar, Dr Jones delved into this rich historical source to explore the history of sewage farming through maps and plans. The title of his talk refers to '*The Seekrits of Sewidge*', a 1870s political squib challenging the cost to ratepayers of new sewage farms in Warwick, work funded by loans taken out by the local authority.

Sewage, in its modern form of a foul liquid conveyed in sewers, is a British invention of the nineteenth century and our current sewerage systems are the legacy of decisions made in the mid-nineteenth century. At that time there were two solutions, each with its own merits. Social reformer Edwin Chadwick proposed that domestic and industrial effluent be kept separate from ground and rain water because the latter could be returned into watercourses. This left a very foul, concentrated sewage which could be used in agriculture, often sprayed as liquid manure. An alternative solution was proposed by Civil Engineer Joseph Bazalgette who wished to avoid the costs of building two sets of sewers by treating all water as contaminated with no recycling. The London sewers took everything to the Thames and relied on the tide to take it away. The latter option won the day and that is why we struggle with sewage now.

The decision was made during a time when there were increasing demands on water supplies, partly because of the introduction of water closets. By the 1870s, large and small towns had to spend their capital to resolve the sewage problem as daily volumes grew -

Birmingham generated 12 million imperial gallons per day and the UK as a whole an estimated 17 billion imperial gallons in 1861. The state of the rivers worsened resulting in public health issues and a large body of responsive legislation, including the Public Health Act 1875 and the Rivers Pollution Prevention Act 1876, as local authorities accepted that they had to find an alternative solution.

One option was to divert sewage to land use, a strategy that raised the potential to make a profit as well as improve public health. There was also a utopian dimension to this – as Victor Hugo wrote, 'The nutrition of plants is the food of men'. Treated sewage was spread as fertiliser and soil improver on fields – the produce was often rye grass for beef cattle, mangelwurzel and swede for dairy cattle; and fodder for the highways department's horses, but also market garden produce (for human consumption) such as potatoes (for the



Sewage disposal works: a guide to the construction of works for the prevention of the pollution by sewage of rivers and estuaries. 2nd ed. W. Santo Crimp. London: Charles Griffin & Co., 1894, p.175.

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/w5vbmkk/items?canvas=217>

workhouse). In 1879, Bedford's combined sewage farm and market garden grew a variety of crops that flourished 'under sewage', including potatoes, rhubarb, cauliflowers, onions, carrots, winter beans, kidney beans, cabbages, lettuces, asparagus and fruit from current trees. Other farms reportedly produced excellent celery and strawberries. Potatoes for

the workhouse and asylum. Clinker, a byproduct of pumping, where used, was also recycled.

For historians, there is a rich source of documented history in the form of maps and plans. Maps were produced to negotiate with land owners; site plans were produced at the time of the establishment of sewage farms; detailed plans were needed for engineered spaces; simplified plans helped to explain the working of the sewage farms, and the associated cost/benefits, to Local Boards of Health Committees and the public. Printed maps, technical designs and lists of sewage farm produce appeared in book form in the civil engineer William Santo Crimp's 'Sewage Disposal Works', published in 1890 with an enlarged 2nd ed. in 1894, who began his work on sewerage works in Melton Mowbray before moving to London.

This was also a time when the profession of sanitary engineering emerged and new journals were published. Ordnance Survey maps of the period show sewage farms, sewage works (which could be water treatment works), filter beds, irrigation farms and, in the case of Merthyr Tydfil, a 'sewage garden'. Carrington Moss, now the training ground for Manchester United, was a sewage farm serving Manchester in the 1890s. OS maps also show sewage trunk pipes and termination tanks; show how hedges were removed; filter beds and marsh-osier beds used for filtering (by the 1960s these appear as circular filter beds).

Early sewage farms may have transformed into modern sewage treatment plants – decisions as to location are not necessarily in the best place for today. Sewage farms were usually located away from population centres. One acre of land could deal with the output of 100 people. Sewage was delivered by gravity rather than pumps, so needed a gentle slope to the farm and required porous soils to allow sewage to percolate rather than run off, though some authorities had to use clay soils in that that was

what they had. Soil survey maps were produced; plans of draining profiles; and much later, X-ray maps show buried pipes. Merthyr Tydfil sewage farm was 14 km from the town, so needed extra-long sewage pipes; Leicester's Abbey Pumping Station pumped city sewage to Beaumont Leys. Birmingham's industries produced a lot of industrial sludge which had to be dried out before spreading on the farm. Plans also show ephemeral features - simple wooden gates, hand cut trenches. Sewage farms were sometimes close to other public utility sites such as sanitoriums and gas works where the local authority owned land.

"The cropping of the farm for the past year (1879) was as follows :—

	A.	R.	P.		A.	R.	P.
Potatoes, ...	12	0	0	Brought forward, .	129	3	20
Rye grass, ...	20	0	0	Winter beans, ...	3	0	0
Rhubarb, ...	0	0	20	Kidney beans, ...	1	1	0
Cauliflowers, ...	6	0	0	Swedes, ...	0	3	0
Prickly comfrey, ...	0	1	0	Cabbage (spring), ...	4	2	0
Barley, ...	4	1	0	Lettuce, ...	0	0	20
Onions, ...	20	1	0	Asparagus, ...	0	1	20
Parsnips, ...	3	1	0	Currant trees, &c., ...	2	0	0
Carrots, ...	6	1	0	Meadow (let), ...	22	2	0
Wheat, ...	16	0	0	Pasture in hand, ...	7	2	0
Mangolds, ...	26	0	0	Savoys (cabbage), ...	5	0	0
Oats, ...	15	2	0	Roads, carriers, &c., ...	6	1	2
Carry forward, ...	129	3	20	Total acreage of farm, .	183	0	22

Crops grown 'under sewage' at Bedford Sewage Farm, 1879. 2nd ed. W. Santo Crimp. London: Charles Griffin & Co., 1894, p.177.

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/w5vbmkk/items?canvas=217>

Dr Jones demonstrated that without maps you cannot make a sense of records relating to sewage farms, especially records of fields, spreading, cropping cycles, and experiments in growing different crops. Maps are also essential for tracking improvement and expansion - Birmingham added several acres per week to their sewage farm whilst small communities had pocket sewage farms located in just one field.

Karen Donegani

Professor Christopher Dyer (Emeritus)

Articles

'Settlement at the margins: living on the edge. Introduction and Discussion', *Medieval Settlement Research*, 40 (2025), pp. 2, 39-43.

'The life of a medieval village and its end: new light on Brookend in Chastleton', (Oxfordshire), *Oxoniensia*, 90 (2025), pp.27-50.

'Carpenters: an important craft in England, 1200-1540', *Vernacular Architecture*, 56 (2025), 1-16.

'Small towns and urbanization in medieval England' in P. Clark (ed.), *Small Towns and Cities in World History* (Turnhout, 2026), pp. 43-58.

'A beginner's guide to medieval farming', *History Extra*, September 2026, pp. 50-6.

Book reviews

Simon Townley (ed.) *Victoria County History for Oxfordshire*, vol 21, *Chipping Norton Oxoniensia*, 90 (2025), pp. 343-6.

Helena Hamerow et al, *Feeding Medieval England: a Long Agricultural Revolution*, in *Agricultural History Review*, 74 (2026), pp.132-3.

Lectures, presentations etc

Manorial court rolls for Brewood, Staffordshire: separating town and country, Ranulf Higden Society, January 2026

Winchcombe Abbey and the crisis of the fourteenth century, Chipping Campden History Society, April 2026.

'How to win friends and influence peasants': friction and neighbourliness in English medieval villages, Canterbury Medieval Weekend, University of Kent, May 2026.

Maxstoke Priory, historical background, Dugdale Society, June 2026.

Current work and new directions in medieval economic and social history, Anglo American Seminar on Medieval Economy and Society, Winchester, July 2026.

Professor Keith Snell (Emeritus)

Keith Snell has completed two autobiographical books, *Wales - Africa: a Tropical Childhood*, and an amusing one entitled *A Rabbit in Cambridge*, which are now out with literary agents and publishers. He continues as a honorary editor of *Rural History* and with various other historical projects.

Dr Juliet Bailey (Honorary fellow)

Publications:

'The distribution and numbers of gamekeepers in Norfolk: 1851 to 1921', *Rural History* (2025) 36: 112-132. Doi: [10.1017/S0956793324000232](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0956793324000232)

Dr Susan Kilby (Honorary fellow)

Publications:

'Nottingham's Street-Names' in P. Cavill (ed.) *Nottinghamshire Place-Names* (Nottingham, 2026)

(Co-editor with Pam Fisher), *Leicestershire Historian*, 62, 2026

Presentations:

Field-Names and Landscape Knowledge: farms on the National Trust Estate and Beyond, National Trust, July 2025

Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them: an Extraordinary Ordinary Landscape, Rutland Local History Society, July 2025

The Place-Names of Charnwood Forest, St Helen's Heritage Group, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, October 2025

Agrarian Activity in a Dynamic Landscape: Field-Names and Field-Management in 14th-century Alrewas, Institute for Name-Studies, University of Nottingham, November 2025

Urban Communities, Street-Names and Challenging Histories, Urban Design Group, November 2025

The Secret Life of the Fields: Shropshire Field-Names Past, Present and Future, Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, January 2026

Wete and Drye: the Importance of Place-Names in the Management of Dynamic Landscapes, University of Nottingham, February 2026

The Place-Names of Charnwood Forest, Charnwood Forest Geopark, February 2026

Local Communities, Street-Names and Challenging Histories, Nottinghamshire County Council, March 2026

Living in the English Medieval Rural Landscape: a Peasant's Perspective, University of Nottingham, June 2026

Dr Mandy de Belin (Honorary fellow)

Book review:

The Enclosure of Northamptonshire, 1485-1901, edited by David Hall and William Franklin, *Midland History*, 50(2), (2025)

Presentations:

Hillesden: An 1100-year gallop through the history of a village, Hillesden Church, August 28th 2026.

Tours of Thornby Hall and Grounds, Heritage Open Day, September 13th 2026.

Podcast:

How did the landscape shape the Civil War battle of Naseby 1645? The World Turned Upside Down, <https://www.worldturnedupsidedown.co.uk/podcast/how-did-the-landscape-shape-civil-war-battle-naseby-1645/>

Yvonne Cresswell (Honorary fellow)

Publications (forthcoming):

Chapters for a forthcoming publication on the Manx artist and designer, Archibald Knox:

- *Designs and Beliefs set in Stone* (Memorial Stone Designs by Archibald Knox)
- *From Fairy Tales and Castles to Grocer's Cheques and Sports Days: the Graphic and Commercial Designs of Archibald Knox*
- *The Deer's Cry - The Man (and Faith) Behind the Art* (provisional title)

Media:

Filming for German documentary on civilian internment on the Isle of Man during the Second World War.

Community Engagement/ Education

Talks to/ for Manx National Heritage, Isle of Man WIs and other Manx community groups on various Manx topics (e.g. Manx art, Manx crofting life & folklore, civilian internment)

Recording & collecting objects from a Methodist chapel that has recently closed, staging a Heritage Open Day harvest festival event at local Methodist chapel

Imagining History

Richard Stone brings us roses

The struggle we know as the Wars of the Roses [1455 – 1485] the dynastic fight between the Houses of Lancaster and York for power in England, takes its name from the supposed use of a red and white rose respectively as heraldic badges. There is no record of the term 'Wars of the Roses' being used at the time. William Shakespeare imagines a scene in King Henry VI Part 1 [Act ii., sc.4] in which the rival factions led by Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York, and Edward Beaufort, Duke of Somerset argue while walking in the gardens of the Inner Temple, established by the Knights Templar but then in the hands of absentee landlords the Knights Hospitaller.

In Shakespeare's narrative they each pick a rose and invite their aristocratic companions to choose likewise to indicate who they will follow.

Richard Plantagenet:
Let him that is a true-born gentleman, And stands upon the honour of his birth, If he suppose that I have pleaded truth, From off this brier pluck a white rose with me.

Edward Beaufort: Let him that is no coward, nor no flatterer, But dare maintain the party of the truth, Pluck a red rose from off this thorn with me.

In a later exchange, Richard Plantagenet

asks: 'Hath not thy rose a canker, Somerset?' To which Beaufort replies: Hath not thy rose a thorn, Plantagenet?

Their actions lead to the following comment from the **Earl of Warwick**: 'This brawl to-day, Grown to this faction in the Temple Garden, Shall send, between the red rose and the white, A thousand souls to death and deadly night.'

While it seems likely, without firm evidence we cannot know for sure if the red and white rose symbols were in use in the 15th century, and if they were, whether they played a significant part



Plucking the Red and White Roses in the Old Temple Gardens Mural by Henry Albert Payne. Courtesy of UK Parliament, Heritage Collections, WOA 2593.

in the civil strife that ensued. Personal devices were certainly adopted: Edward IV's 'Sun in splendour' and Richard III's 'White Boar' are examples. Did Shakespeare invent the roses? Base his exchange on legend? Or was he



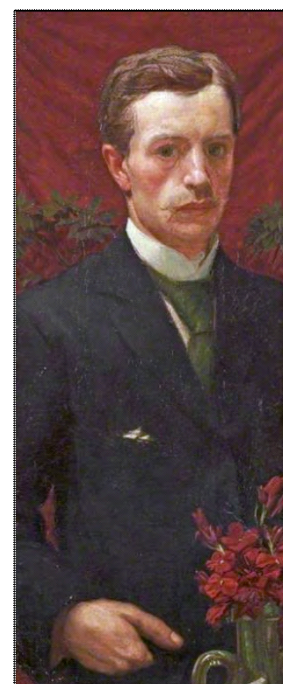
prudently peddling Tudor propaganda in support of Henry VII's tenuous legitimacy, emphasising an end to division and conflict through his marriage to Elizabeth of York and merging the red and white roses to create a potent symbol of their union - the Tudor rose?

After Shakespeare, the first mention of the roses as emblems of the Lancastrians and Yorkists is in Volume 2 of Scottish historian David Hume's *History of England* [1762] in a reference to 'the quarrel between the two roses'. The term 'Wars of the Roses' then becomes popular thanks to Walter Scott's use of the description in his novel *Anne of Geierstein* [1829].

Henry Albert Payne, commissioned in 1908 by Liberal politician William Lygon, Earl Beauchamp, to produce a mural for the east corridor of the Palace of Westminster on a

Tudor theme, chose to depict the scene described by Shakespeare. Birmingham-born Payne had worked for Earl Beauchamp at Madresfield Court, near Malvern in Worcestershire. Best-known for his stained-glass, Payne was among the group of artists and craftspeople associated with the Birmingham School of Art in the late-19th and early-20th century. His preparatory painting for the mural is in the collection of Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery.

Henry Albert Payne



The Inner Temple has had a gardener since at least 1307. The gardens are a tranquil oasis in central London and are usually open to the public on weekdays from 12.30 until 3pm [excluding Bank Holidays].

Rosa Anne of Geierstein is a fragrant and vigorous wild rose hybrid named after Scott's character by Lord Penzance in 1894.

Shrine survival and pilgrimage

Richard Stone introduces us to two surviving shrines

Shrines were a subsidiary business for the medieval Church. Pilgrims in search of intercession - forgiveness, favour or a cure for ailments - brought offerings and prestige. Most English cathedrals, many abbeys and some parish churches had shrines containing the relics of saints. Their importance increased hugely after the murder of Thomas Becket in 1170. The archbishop's brutal demise on his way to vespers in Canterbury Cathedral ignited a new age of saints. Within hours of his death, monks were selling bottles of Becket's blood and claims mounted of miracle cures from contact with what were said to be bloodstained

fragments of his clothing. As pilgrims began flocking to Canterbury, Durham Cathedral rushed out a new *Life of St Cuthbert*. Hereford, Lincoln and Norwich followed with new lives of St Ethelbert, St Hugh, and St Remigius respectively. In 1187, to promote her shrine in the abbey church, Abbot Nicholas incorporated St Modwen on the seal of Burton Abbey and added her name to the abbey's dedication.

Then came the Henrician Reformation. Pilgrimages to shrines were banned by royal decree in 1538. The veneration of relics was viewed by Protestants as superstitious idolatry. In a transfer of wealth and power to the secular



state, shrines were destroyed with thoroughness and determination, stripped of valuables and broken up: the bones of saints scattered. Some, St Werburgh's shrine in Chester Cathedral is an example, have been partially reconstructed in more recent times. Britain's first shrine, to St Alban, was reinstated in 1993. St Alban's Way is a pilgrimage route from St Paul's Cathedral to St Albans. A 35-mile route usually completed in five stages over four days.

Only two English shrines and their contents are known to have escaped desecration. One was that of Edward the Confessor [canonised in 1161] in Westminster Abbey. A little of the ornamental superstructure was removed but the shrine remained largely intact, saved by royal association. The second is the shrine of St Wite, a simple altar tomb in the north transept of the Church of St Candida and Holy Cross at Whitchurch Canonorum, between Lyme Regis and Bridport in Dorset. Openings in the tomb, known as *formina*, allowed pilgrims to insert parts of their body, or perhaps items belonging to a sick person in need of intercession. The shrine was believed to be empty. In 1900, repairs necessitated by the appearance of a crack in the limestone and marble shrine revealed a lead coffin inscribed *Hic requiescunt reliquie sancte Wite* [Here lies the body of Saint Wite]. Inside was a reliquary containing bones identified as belonging to a small woman who was aged around 40 when she died.

According to local folklore, Wite was a ninth-century Anglo-Saxon hermit who lived on the hilly coast nearby and lit fires to guide sailors at night. She was supposedly killed during a raid by Danish Vikings. A devastating attack is known to have taken place at Charmouth around AD 832. There are alternative theories including an attribution as St Candida, a fourth-century martyr murdered in north Africa, and as St Gwen, a Breton saint. Wite [pronounced 'Wee-ta'] Candida and Gwen all mean 'white'. There is no reason to doubt local oral tradition. St Wite has been adopted as the patron saint of Dorset. Her Feast and 'Dorset Day' are celebrated on 1 June.

In a small enclosure on a nearby hillside at Morecombelake, is St Wite's Holy Well, now in the care of the National Trust. The British Pilgrimage Trust organise a one-day guided St Wite's Way experience [£50 includes a packed lunch] starting and ending at the Church of St Candida and Holy Cross. The route covers eight miles and takes around six hours.

A relatively isolated location may have helped the tomb survive, but it was a well-known and popular pilgrim destination before the Reformation. Just how did St Wite's shrine and its contents escape destruction? It's a miracle. Might there be another?



A similar style altar tomb of the 13th or 14th century can be found in the Church of the Holy Cross at Ilam in Staffordshire. This is the shrine of St Bertram, patron saint of Stafford. Bertram is supposed to have been a seventh or early-

eighth century local lad of noble birth who lived as a hermit in the area and dedicated his life to preaching after his wife and newborn baby were attacked by wolves.

Whether the remains of St Bertram are physically present is unproven, but the simple shrine appears to be intact. It still attracts pilgrims who leave prayers for intercession written on cards and scraps of paper and visit a nearby Holy Well. St Bertram's Feast Day is celebrated on 10 August.

A 39-mile, four-day pilgrimage route has been designed beginning at the shrine of St Bertram and ending at St Lawrence's Church, Eyam.

There is further information on the route with suggested rest stops at: <https://www.peakpilgrimage.org.uk/>



Steam with the Team

Mandy de Belin goes 'access all areas' at Abbey Pumping Station

At the back of Abbey pumping station, you could look at the elevation with its grand bay windows and entrance doorway and think you'd made a mistake and were visiting a high-status Victorian house. But stop and listen and you'd find the house has a deep and sonorous heartbeat. No, you haven't strayed into an Edgar Allan Poe story, what you can hear is one of the four mighty beam engines, originally tasked with pumping the sewage from the growing city of Leicester out to the 'city farms' at Beaumont Leys.

Inspired by Richard's paper on sewage farms (see p.26) I booked myself onto a 'Steam with the Team' tour at the pumping station. This gives you a guided tour of all levels – from the beams at the very top to the pumps and valve gear in the cellars. I learned that the only day when they would historically have had all four engines working together was a Monday when Leicester was doing its washing. Seeing one in action was impressive but imagine seeing all four! All of the

engines are now restored to working order but take it in turns to be run. The last time they were all run together was 2014 (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oKnR59YzZ0U>). Nowadays, they have to hire in another boiler to provide enough steam to run all four.



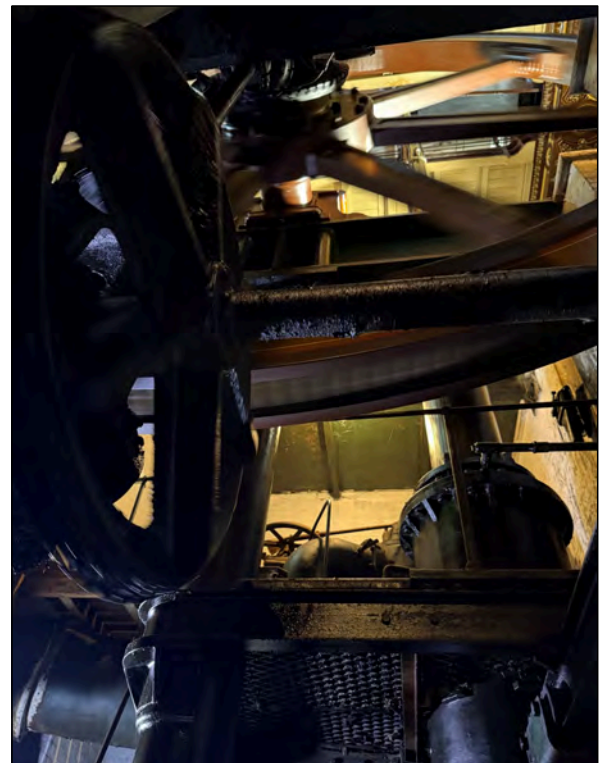


The beams

The basement



The flywheel



The view up from the basement



A low-pressure cylinder

What the editor has been listening to...

I'm afraid that as the world has turned darker, so my podcast habit has got worse. I have now discovered the Podbean app, and an ability to blank repetitive adverts from my mind. This has given me access to a whole new world of podcasts, and I'm sharing some more of my favourites here.



American History Hit – part of the 'History Hit' stable, I've learned a lot of US history from this at a time when the behaviour 'over there' is rather perplexing. There is much content about the War of Independence, and the Civil War, but there has also some fascinating episodes looking at events from the perspective of Native Americans. The host and his guests have done a lot between them to convince me not to write their country off just yet...

Ghosts of Dallas – this is a deep dive into that most infamous episode in US history that launched a thousand conspiracy theories. The (Australian) host is in no doubt that Lee Harvey Oswald assassinated John F Kennedy and that he acted alone. Several episodes exhaustively go through the evidence and contain many reflections on why people have been so intent on coming up with such elaborate alternatives (and what this tells us about other conspiracy theories).

Paranormia – one that isn't strictly history. Under the 'true crime' banner it looks at historical paranormal events but attempts to come up with rational, mainly psychological explanations of these happenings. I generally approve of that approach (I'm always on 'team skeptic' if I listen to the BBC's 'Uncanny').

Buried evidence - another 'true crime' strand with historian Rebecca Rideal and archaeologist Raksha Dave. They use their skills to revisit historic mysteries and crimes. I particularly enjoyed two recent episodes on Franklin's doomed Arctic expedition and some new theories about why it really failed.

Beyond the Knife - this is a monthly podcast from the Surgeons' Hall Museum. It is medical history with some fascinating episodes available. I got a real feel for Edinburgh's revolutionary role in the development of medicine and surgery (not to mention body snatching).

History Rage - each week the host poses the question "What's the one historical 'fact' you wish everyone would just stop believing?" to the invited historian and allows them to rage in response. Generally it is both amusing and informative (I could add a few rages of my own).

The Tudor Chest - a good range of mostly (but not exclusively) Tudor subjects with articulate, knowledgeable guests. A nice, reliable listen.

History Extra - the podcast version of the History Extra magazine (previously BBC History). Another reliably informative and interesting podcast.

We have ways - A very deep dive into world War 2 history, particularly the military side. Saved from being too serious by being co-hosted by comedian Al Murray (who did study history and is very knowledgeable).

I also continue to recommend the 'History Hit' staples **Betwixt the Sheets**, **Gone Medieval**, **The Ancients**, **Not Just the Tudors**, **After Dark**, and **Dan Snow's History Hit**

Two of our best friends are **Professor Andrew Hopper**, and **Dr Ismini Pells**, previously of the Centre, and now of the University of Oxford Department for Continuing Education, and we are always happy to report their news.

Unfortunately our publication date was too late to publicise some of their recent talks:

16 Oct 2026 Kineton and District Local History Group
Andrew Hopper, Warwick Castle during the English Civil Wars

17 Oct 2026 National Civil War Centre Study Day hosted by
Lincoln Record Society

31 Oct 2026 Market Harborough Study Day Ismini Pells and
Andrew Hopper, Richard Cust and Kate Peters

But still plenty of time to sign up for these:

6 March 2027 Women and Children during the English Civil Wars
(Ismini Pells, Imogen Peck, Andrew Hopper, Ann Hughes)
Register here: <https://lifelong-learning.ox.ac.uk/courses/women-and-children-during-the-english-civil-wars-o26p110hij/>

17 April 2027 Oxford in the Civil Wars Study Day
Register here: <https://lifelong-learning.ox.ac.uk/courses/oxford-at-war-the-city-during-the-english-civil-wars-o26p112hij/>

Andrew's upcoming book *Widowhood and Bereavement in the English Civil Wars* is in production and should be available from the OUP in April 2027

Dave Fogg Postles

Publications:

'Pro Bono Pacis et Concordie: Arbitration in English Ecclesiastical Courts in the Late Middle Ages' *Law and History Review* 44 (2026), pp. 115-31

is OpenAccess at:

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/law-and-history-review/article/pro-bono-pacis-et-concordie-arbitration-in-english-ecclesiastical-courts-in-the-late-middle-ages/E6DEEA8DA0C6AEADCA2CD81AE3B9E790>

Richard Stone

Presentations:

'The Godwin Dynasty' Mid-Trent and Mercia Historical Association (11 October, 8 November, 13 December 2025)

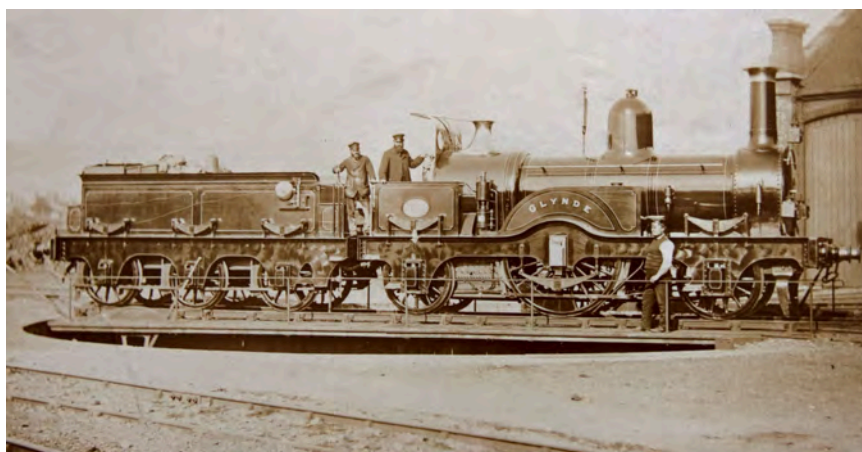
'What's in a name' Mid-Trent and Mercia Historical Association (31 March 2026)

Richard is still producing a video on YouTube every Friday, Follow this link <https://www.youtube.com/@HistoryRich/playlists> to access the playlist.

And we're always happy to report when a Friend completes their PhD. See overleaf for news of John Pullin and his thesis on early engine drivers (and also pictures of two engines from the 1860s, London & North Western Railway 0-6-0 goods engine, no 578, and London Brighton & South Coast Railway 2-2-2 express passenger engine 'Glynde' - note the lack of protection for both driver and fireman)

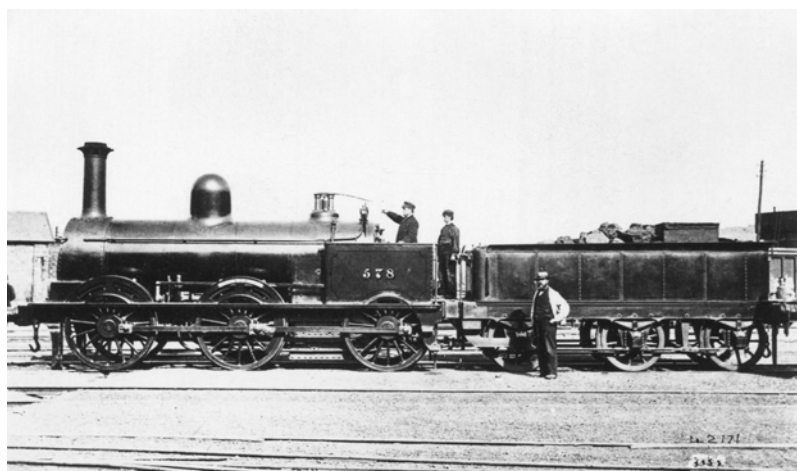
John Pullin graduated this summer from the University of Leicester with a PhD; John was earlier a part-time student on the MA course in English Local History between 2014 and 2016, graduating in 2017.

John's PhD thesis is titled 'Engine Drivers in Local, Regional and National Context, 1850–1885' and it aims to uncover not just the realities of the job, but also the individual working and domestic lives of the men who drove the locomotives. Principally it uses primary sources such as censuses, family and BMD records, and the limited surviving documents of the English and Welsh railway companies. John said: 'It's been an anomaly for many years that, although transport history in general and railway history in particular are both vast and popular, little work has been done on individual railway workers beyond the "celebrity" railway pioneers, locomotive designers and a few railway company managers.' The research covers the time after the gung-ho pioneering days of railways, when the engine-driver occupation had settled down with rules, timetables and a disciplinary code, through to the period when the railway unions emerged as effective intermediaries between the individual drivers and their employers.



John's thesis argues that the relationship between the men and the railway companies was riddled with inconsistency, resentments and mutual dependence. Drivers were collectively prized and praised by their employers, but also subjected individually to constant pettifogging discipline that undermined job security; the pay was good, but individual drivers reached wage

maximums very quickly and there was limited prospect of career progression; the apparent benevolence of railway company paternalism soured as benefits were outweighed by demands on drivers' working hours and constant availability. A highly responsible job that required physical robustness, technical knowledge and constant decision-making was glamorous and desirable in 1850, but the subject of considerable dissatisfaction by 1885, with industrial relations consequences that perhaps linger up to the present day.



The research for John's PhD found other anomalies. An occupation that brought personal mobility to millions became itself less mobile in this period; a job that excluded women from direct employment nevertheless relied on women's work in many aspects; a 'new' activity quickly developed the family ties and handed-down skills of earlier established trades.

Behind the research, John has assembled a database of more than 15,000 individual engine drivers who worked on the railways of England and Wales between 1850 and 1885; the aim now, he says, is to make the database available to other researchers and to expand it. He is also happy to be in touch with individual researchers who might have a Victorian engine driver in their sights and want to know more.

John's supervisors at Leicester were Professor Kevin Schürer and Dr James Moore, and when Professor Schürer departed, Dr Moore was joined by Professor Prashant Kidambi.



Victoria County History

It's been another busy year for VCH Leicestershire, and I'm delighted to be able to report that the forthcoming partnership publication (as we are now encouraged to call the paperback series), *Loughborough Since 1750: A Social and Cultural History*, researched and written by Dr Pam Fisher, is now with our new publishers, HobNob Press. Copies will be for sale before Christmas 2026.

Previous paperbacks were published by the University of London but, like many publishers, they have

reconsidered their business model and turned away from publishing VCH paperbacks. The process before publication is unchanged, with all text agreed by VCH Central Office, who arrange an anonymous external peer review and

approve final revisions before it is sent to a publisher, enabling the book to carry the VCH branding. HobNob Press is a specialist local history publisher based in Gloucester whose proprietor, Dr John Chandler, is also an experienced VCH author. We are presently planning our launch event in Loughborough. If you would like to attend, please contact Pam Fisher who will be able to provide details when the arrangements have been made.

The book is longer than originally envisaged, at nearly 300 pages. Loughborough has a

complex history, and we felt we could not do justice to this, and produce a text that remained readable, in a more concise form. There are major sections on social history, schools, sport, education and religious history, as well as detailed consideration of the evolution of the four settlements of Loughborough, Woodthorpe, Knightthorpe and Nanpantan since 1750. Work is now underway on a second book, *Loughborough Since 1750: Earning a Living*.

Speaking of Nanpantan, readers may recall that

we mentioned in last year's Newsletter that VCH Leicestershire had completed a volunteer project funded by Charnwood Forest Geopark and the National Lottery Heritage Fund looking at the history of the (originally small) settlement located around a



crossroads at the southern tip of the ancient parish of Loughborough. Part of this year has been spent delivering talks on Nanpantan and leading guided walks along Nanpantan Road. An article is also underway.

There was further good news as 2025 came to a close, as VCH Leicestershire was awarded another contract by Charnwood Forest Geopark to produce a series of 20 'Historical Digests' for parishes and villages within the Geopark area. These are brief introductory histories for each place, looking at boundaries, landscape,

geology, settlement, population, industry, significant buildings and notable people, and will be published on the Geopark website in early 2027. Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, more than 50 local volunteers will help with this research. Dr Susan Kilby worked on this project for the first few months, and recruited, trained and guided the first volunteers, who began work on Thornton and Botcheston. In March, Susan was appointed by the University of Nottingham, Institute of Name-Studies to join a new project 'Rediscovering the Tudor Domesday', which will present the details within Henry VIII's *Valor Ecclesiasticus* in website form. We were sorry to lose her, but she departed with our best wishes for this well-deserved position. Dr Francis Boorman has subsequently been appointed as a consultant by VCH Leicestershire to continue the work.

Francis is the co-author of two VCH paperback histories, of St Clement Danes (1660–1900) and St George, Hanover Square (1724–1900) and lives in London. Using the summer months to become familiar with Leicestershire places and sources, and working with some of Susan's original volunteers, we are now moving into the final phase and are recruiting another group of volunteers to start work this month, looking principally at Markfield, Stanton under Bardon and Bardon, three villages with large quarries. We would be very pleased to hear from anyone who would like to help with these or other villages in the short period before the project ends in December 2026.

Pam Fisher
pjf7@le.ac.uk

Prince Rupert

Not 'Wrong' and
definitely
'Wromantic'

The Naseby Battlefield Project held an event to reward their volunteers and supporters earlier in the year. As well as tea and coffee and a truly excellent selection of cakes, we were treated to a talk about Prince Rupert by writer Mark Turnbull.

Prince Rupert was the archetypal Royalist hero and Parliamentary villain. There have been many works covering the life of Rupert, but our speaker thought there was room for some new angles in looking at his life. The key was to go back to the archives, an exercise that cast doubt on both the material that glorified him, and that which demonized him. A particular area of interest was the women in Rupert's life – a subject that had not previously been adequately investigated, he felt.

Parliament had many colourful names for Prince Rupert – 'the Duke of Plunderland', 'Prince Robber', 'Diabolical cavalier' – but was he really just an aristocratic thug? He could hardly avoid the reputation of being a foreign interloper. He was the son of the Frederick, the Elector

Palatine, whose heritage was a mixture of German and Dutch. His mother (Charles's



sister) had both Scottish and Danish blood. In 1618, at the beginning of the 30 years war, Frederick accepted the crown of Bohemia. And so Bohemia was the land of Rupert's birth, and his father planned to make him his heir there, but unfortunately the family were ejected just a year after he was born. They also lost their ancestral lands and so were forced into exile in Holland.

As a child, Rupert idolized Gustavus Adolphus, who was storming through Europe with his new military tactics. Unfortunately, the Swedish King was not enthusiastic about restoring Frederick to his lands. Frederick died of fever in 1632 (the same year that Gustavus Adolphus was killed in battle). Rupert's family were then entirely beholden to Charles I. The thirteen-year-old Rupert wrote a letter to his uncle pledging his service, but it was a few more years until the prince reached England. Still in Europe, Rupert's only chance of restoring the family fortunes was to fight.

His first military experience was of sieges in the Low Countries. He fought his first real battle at the age of seventeen; he fought well but the army was defeated and he was taken captive. He was kept prisoner in Austria for three years (and his mother was terrified that he would convert to Catholicism while there). The emperor was apparently 'fed up' with his prisoner, while Charles was putting constant pressure on him for Rupert's release, which eventually paid off and left Rupert wanting to go to England to thank his uncle in person. He landed a month before war broke out.

This was the time when Hull closed its gates to the King, and Coventry not only shut its gates, but took pot shots at the Royal party too. Rupert was outraged, and was of the opinion that Charles's 'gentleness' was a bad thing. At 22-years-old, Rupert became a general of horse. He also became infamous through Parliamentary propaganda, and even his dog, Boy, was blamed for all sorts of outrages (having a devoted animal sidekick was given an interpretation of devilish magic).

Rupert's first significant military action was at Powick Bridge in Worcestershire, where he was leading a small cavalry detachment that was scouting for the opposition. The subsequent

encounter has been characterized by Clarendon's unfavourable narrative that had him riding into the skirmish without even knowing that his troopers were behind him. But Powick Bridge, our speaker suggested, took only fifteen minutes and saw the parliamentary side falling into a trap and being ambushed. A definite success for Rupert.

The first major battle was Edgehill, where Rupert's horse certainly made an impact but were unable to press the advantage home, leaving the battle an indecisive one. Rupert wanted to take a flying column to London after the battle, but the King was reluctant to attack the capital. Rupert received more unfavourable publicity after Edgehill, where he was accused of riding off the field and massacring civilians. He refuted this strongly, claiming he could produce 1,000 witnesses to the contrary and denouncing this 'scribbling age'. Rupert had no stake in the country and was there purely to support his uncle. This situation earned him enemies on the Royalist side and he often found himself fighting on two fronts.

Our speaker suggested that Rupert's defeat at Marston Moor came about because he abandoned his normal tactics. The next year at Naseby he did want to engage the New Model Army at some point, but was misled into thinking that his opponents were withdrawing when they were actually relocating to a better site for a battle. At Naseby, Rupert's normal tactics seemed to be succeeding but things turned around leading to the definitive defeat of the Royalist army, and ultimately the loss of the first civil war.

Leaving Rupert's military career, we turned to the subject of the 6ft 4ins tall, famously handsome prince's love life. He was said to have had an affair with Lady Catherine Scott while she was in Oxford in 1644 and estranged from her parliamentarian husband, and to have been the true father of her son (she was sister of cavalry commander George Goring). Some discounted this tale as the result of her husband's attempted divorce proceedings, especially as he withdrew accusations before his death in 1663 and this son inherited from him. Turnbull, however, has found a letter in the Scott archives which does substantiate accounts of the affair.

A more widely acknowledged relationship was Rupert's affair with Frances Bard, with whom he had a son, Dudley. She was a Catholic convert and they were not together long (Rupert remained, in our speaker's words, 'a beacon of Protestantism' during the Restoration period). Frances later insisted that they had been married, but evidence of this was not forthcoming. Rupert finally found a longer-term partner in the form of actress Margaret Hughes. Together they had a daughter named Ruperta, but, again, he did not marry her.

Rupert had many other achievements during the Restoration. He developed mezzotint engraving and, as an amateur scientist, designed various instruments and tested out war equipment. He invested in the exploration of and trade with Canada.

In 1682 he signed his will, then four days later went to the theatre. He took to his bed and died on his return, at the age of 62. (Quite a life.)

Mandy de Belin

Frances Bard



Margaret Hughes



Book Reviews

The great thing about writing the book reviews for the Newsletter is that I get to choose the books. This year's selections cover two of my favourite subjects: horses and buildings.

Medieval Warhorse: Equestrian Landscapes, Material Culture and Zooarchaeology in Britain, AD 800–1550

Edited by Oliver H. Creighton, Robert Liddiard, Alan K. Outram, Carly Ameen, Kate Kanne, (Liverpool 2025)

I selected this book for review partly because it was co-edited by this year's Hoskins lecturer (although it is a very different time period and subject) and partly because, as someone who has shared most of their life with horses, I find the whole project absolutely fascinating. My first observation is what an extremely handsome volume this is. I am used to academic titles being rather pricey, but when this arrived I was impressed with both its size and its lavish illustrations (I definitely felt that I had my 'money's worth').

The book is the result of the Warhorse project that started in 2020 as a collaborative venture between the University of Exeter's Department of Archaeology and the Department of History at the University of East Anglia. The project combined the methods of historical and archaeological research to conduct the first ever systematic study of warhorses, and horses more generally, from medieval Britain over the date range 800-1550.

The first question that the work addresses the subject of how exactly horses were used in warfare in this period. It seeks to puncture, or at least query, some of the previously held truths of medieval warfare. Mainly it addresses the narrative that the Normans introduced cavalry that then grew in importance, finding its ultimate expression in the armoured knight mounted on the Destrier (which resembled a modern shire horse in height and build). From the evidence the conclusion were drawn that, in the first three hundred years or so of the study period, horses used for warfare and horses used for hunting were more or less interchangeable. Although

there were changes in horse culture in this period, the work concludes that it was aristocratic power (as demonstrated through horsemanship) rather than warfare itself that drove these changes. The next two hundred years (c.1160-1360) was when the warhorse began to have a distinct identity from that of other elite horses. This was also the period when the mounted warrior maintained a privileged position.

The final two hundred years provided a bit of an anomaly. This was the period from which ever more decorative horse armour survives. It also witnessed the transition of tiltyards from being temporary installations to becoming permanent purpose-built structures. So far as actual warfare was concerned however, the role of the horse changed, with many pitched battles involving the clash of unmounted forces with elite warriors dismounting for the purpose. The faster, nimbler 'courser' became more the desirable horse for warfare, rather than the heavier 'destrier'.

The book provides an in-depth discussion of what they term 'the royal horse network'. A good source for this is available in the form of the *equitium regis*, manuscript records from the late thirteenth century that give a detailed insight into the royal equine establishments over several decades. This chapter shows the types of landscapes used for breeding and training, as well as financial and economic structures. It particularly emphasized the role that parks played in breeding and keeping horses, over and above the traditional 'deer park' narrative. I found the concept of the 'horse pool' particularly

interesting as this provided locations specifically for the training of young horses as well as providing facilities for the rest and recreation of the working royal horses (the horse pool facilities were dispersed and sold off after 1360, and an organizational reform was enacted that gave rise to the prestigious office of 'master of horse').

The authors go on to investigate the physical infrastructure of horse keeping, and what survives to inform the insights provided by the documentary evidence. There is a difficulty in securely identifying what were stable buildings, and distinguishing them from what might have been other ancillary buildings in elite locations.

They do have some success in identifying the remains of stable complexes, some quite large, in castle locations. Some sites offer several candidates, some at the heart of the castle complex and some outside the curtilage, which is suggested might reflect the different roles of the horses being accommodated: from keeping lordly mounts on-hand ready for service, to providing housing for visitors' mounts, to stabling for the more lowly working horses. Flooring can provide evidence for a

building's use as a stable as many have stone floors and include drainage channels. The position of supporting facilities, such as farrieries, is also considered. The infrastructure related to the sites of breeding studs proves harder to detect. Although there is evidence for permanent structure, there is a limited survival of tangible features in the landscape.

Further material culture that informs the history of warhorses survives in the form of the artistic

representation of horses. This includes sculpture and various ornamental depictions as well as pictorial forms such as tapestries and wall paintings. The authors describe a move from equine art (horses with no rider) in the early medieval period to equestrian art (horse with rider) and the associated symbolism of what it said about the status of horse rider.

There is also some investigation of how representative the physical representations of horses and their equipment actually were.

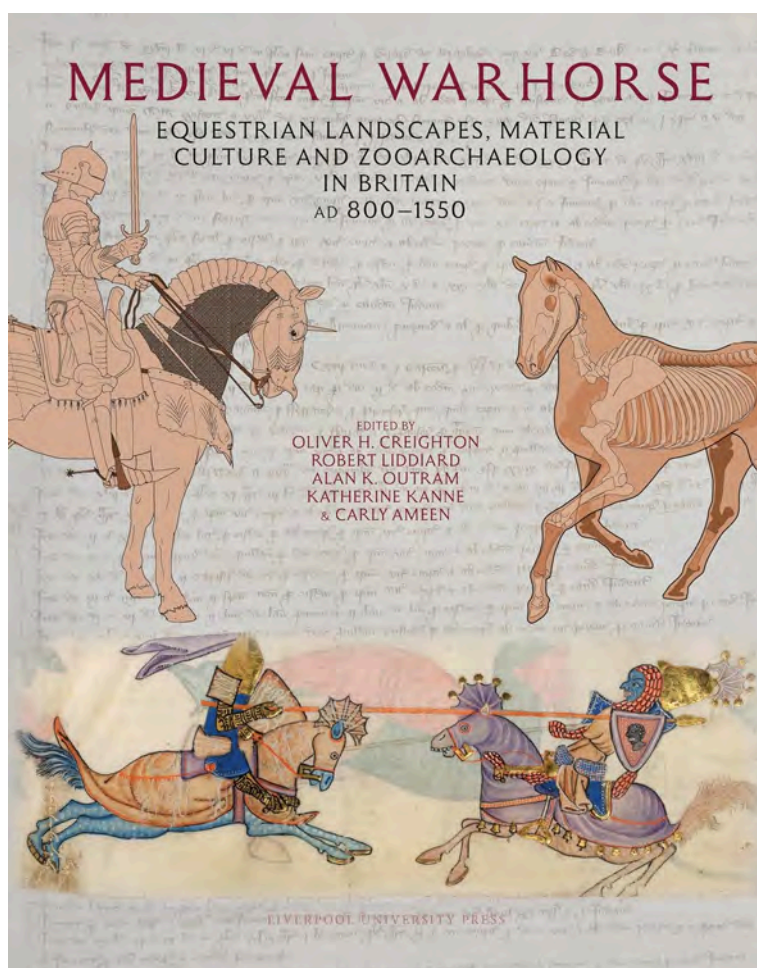
The project also investigated portable equestrian material culture. Unfortunately, leather does not survive in the ground so we are limited in seeing the exact nature of medieval

saddlery and harness. But bits, stirrups, and horseshoes do survive. Objects with non-ferrous adornments are better represented because they are more likely to be discovered by detectorists. The surviving objects do attest to the introduction of the curb bit (as opposed to the snaffle), which was a Norman innovation.

Horse equipment and art meet specifically in horse armour. This has the potential to say a lot about the uses

of horses in warfare and about size and shape of medieval horses, but has mostly been studied by art historians to date. There is also the caveat that armour tends to survive from later periods, when armour was more to do with display and tournaments than utility and war.

The study finally arrives at the zooarchaeological examination of horse remains. Horse bones do not survive in dig sites in anything like the same density as the remains



of food animals. However, by aggregating the results from the various remains that have been found, the study has arrived at some meaningful results. When combined with other evidence, such as surviving horseshoes, the study came to the unavoidable conclusion that horses were much smaller in the past. The medieval warhorse, far from being the size and shape of a 17-18hh shire, was in fact between 14hh and 15hh, with some outliers perhaps reaching 16hh at the very end of the period. ('hh' = hands high, with a hand being 4 inches and the measurement taken to the withers at the base of the horse's neck). As far as shape was concerned, the study detected increasing robustness, particularly in the hind limbs. Norman horses were gracile as well as short, being more finely built than earlier horses of the British Isles. The vast majority of medieval horses were 'ponies' by modern characterization, but the distinction between ponies and horses (the borderline being 14.2hh) did not exist in this period. The smaller size of medieval horses comes as no surprise to this modern horse owner, who has marvelled over the tiny medieval horseshoes in museums and studied the efforts of stock 'improvers' to increase horse size from the agricultural revolution onwards. (It is also the matter of

some satisfaction to the 5ft 8in rider of a 14hh Fell pony.)

DNA and isotopic evidence had more to say on the origins, distribution, and gender of medieval horses. Some animals had foreign origins, but most were native bred rather than imported. Most high-status horses were stallions. They could also detect young horses being moved from studs into training facilities at the age of two or three.

The final chapter concentrates upon the social context of the horse and investigates how the human-horse relationship had changed over the study period, and particularly how horses were privileged among other animals (along with dogs and hawks). The authors seek to bring their synthesis of historical and archaeological techniques to address more general themes of



One of my favourite depictions of a medieval warhorse



My robust, 14 hh horse, who is probably nearer the truth

debate about the middle ages.

I did have some questions that I would like to put to the team that were not answered in the book. I wanted to know the average heights of the men (and it was mostly men) that were riding these horses. I also wanted to know if they had evidence of when gelding became a common practice? Lastly, I wish the study had gone a bit further on in time. They have discounted the use of cavalry in much of the fighting in this period, but I know from my own

studies that cavalry were key in many of the set battles of the first civil war (following the innovations of Gustavus Adolphus).

This book certainly has much to commend itself to the horse-loving historian, but it contains much of wider interest, from the impact of horse

breeding and horse keeping upon the landscape to the development of military techniques.

Mandy de Belin

The Buildings Archaeologist: Discovering the Secrets of Britain's Ancient Buildings

James Wright (Cheltenham 2026)

Regular readers will remember that I reviewed James Wright's 'Medieval Mythbusting' two issues ago. Hot off the press is a new book by the same author that has a more general look at buildings archaeology.

The book is divided into two parts. The first gives a history of the development of buildings archaeology as a discipline, including the development of the author as a buildings archaeologist.

People have long been interested in the stories behind the structures that they encountered, and in giving interpretations of what they see (ofttimes to suit their own agenda). The author traces the growth of an interest in buildings from the efforts of individual monks in the middle ages through to the travellers, antiquarians, and mapmakers of the sixteenth century onwards. While interest was initially restricted to ecclesiastical and other high-status buildings, interest gradually spread to take in more humble 'vernacular' architecture. The nineteenth century saw the founding of several county archaeological groups, and the tentative beginning of legislation intended to help preserve and protect valuable historical buildings.

The twentieth century saw still greater appreciation of all aspects of the built environment, and the beginning of the practice of 'listing' buildings in order to protect them. Several special interest groups began to emerge concerned with different types of architectures. There were counter forces too, such as the belief that decrepit townscapes

should be swept away and replaced with modernist developments (which were themselves often poor in design and quality compared with what they replaced). Certain key losses at the hands of unscrupulous developers, the Firestone Art Deco factory in Brentford being a prime example, fed into an upswell of popular opinion that important architecture should be preserved. The situation is much improved in the twenty-first century, but there are, the author argues, still great gaps in our understanding of old and ancient buildings (not least the inaccuracy of many current listings).

Having looked at the growth of the history of buildings as a subject of serious study, the author goes on to describe the development of the profession of buildings archaeologist. He does so by using his own career as an exemplar. From archaeology degree to various contracts and then permanent jobs within the archaeological profession, a detour into training as a stonemason, then back to archaeology with an increasing emphasis on buildings, until able to set up his own consultancy business (supplemented with the very popular 'Medieval Mythbusting' online lectures during lockdown).

The second part of the book describes the work that the buildings archaeologist actually does and the techniques that are available to them.

The starting point is often a look at published resources, to see if anyone else has commented on the building and what their thoughts and observations are. The book usefully contains references to the datasets that can be consulted and also recommends that works by the antiquarians discussed in Part 1 are also looked at. Newspapers and magazines are also a good source. Maps can be useful,

although it is not until enclosure and tithe maps that you are likely to see actual representations of individual buildings. Historic OS maps are now available online free of charge.

Archival work should be pursued too. Although what documents survive that might be useful depend entirely upon the circumstances of the individual building. These might include surviving accounts relating to the actual construction of the building, although these can only give a date when the building was underway, not necessarily when it was started. Documentation relating to the actual design of early buildings is, however, incredibly rare. Personal papers of past owners such as wills and inventories can be useful where they survive. Papers relating to property transfers can be informative, and at later dates, sales particulars might be available with detailed descriptions and even photographs of the building.

One modern technique that has transformed the dating of buildings is dendrochronology. Because the tree rings of oak trees reflect the climatic conditions of each year of growth, the felling of the tree can be dated by reference to a large and growing database of tree ring data. There is plenty of evidence to the effect that ancient buildings were constructed from green wood, so construction started very soon after the felling date. Reuse of older timbers in a building can generally be detected by the existence of extra peg-holes and so forth. There are some potential problems with tree ring dating, such as non-local wood being used (databases are region-specific) and wood other than oak being used. There are additional scientific methods for dating available, but these are more expensive than tree ring dating.

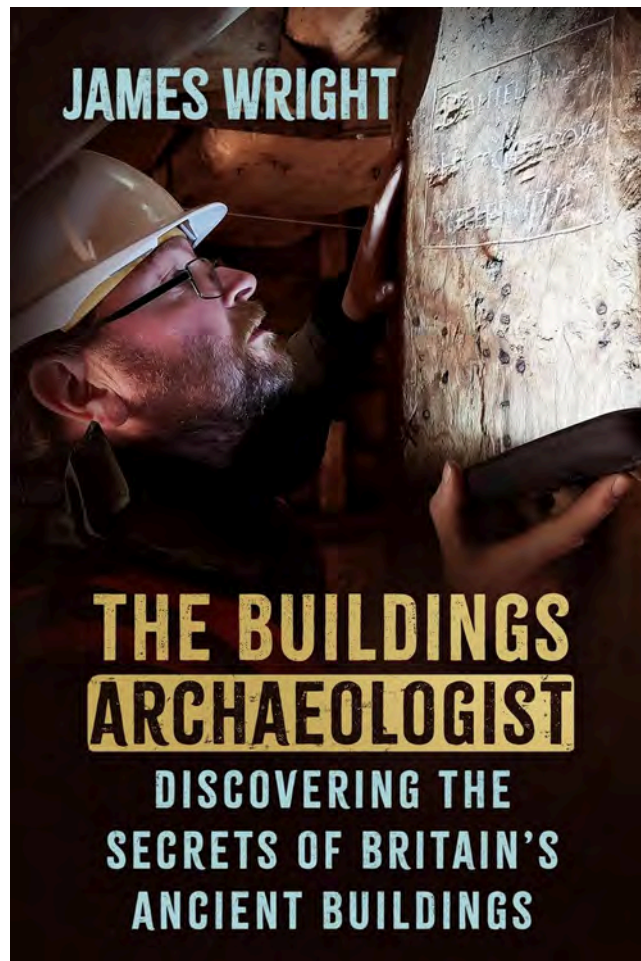
There are different levels at which a building can be surveyed, from a basic visual record that records location, function, and age, up to an analytical record of the building that details origins, development, and use and includes the results of a full archival search, dendrochronology results and so on.

You can learn a lot about a building from the careful analysis of the materials that have been used for the various phases of its construction.

Many vernacular buildings use locally-sourced materials, but materials could also be transported for higher status buildings. An example of this might be transporting stone to an area that has no indigenous suitable stone (Norfolk is cited as an example of such an area). Brick was also a high-status building material when it was introduced. First appearing in the twelfth century, it did not find significant favour until the later fourteenth century. Brick became

fashionable in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Even in high-status stone and brick buildings, timber was still used in great quantities. We associate surviving timber-framed buildings with the black and white structures common in counties such as Herefordshire, but the black appearance is a relatively recent result of the application of coal tar and is not all that healthy for the timber underneath.

The choice of building materials can affect the form of the building, but so can tradition, funding, and location. These considerations apply to the investigation of all levels of building,



from a castle to a cottage. All of them involve the investigator thinking about the lived experience of the past inhabitants in order to explain their original form and subsequent developments. Function, and the change of function over the years, plays an important part in analysis. Here there is a bit of synchronicity with our other book review, as one of the examples of changing function is the supposed stables at Tattersall Castle. The author investigated these on behalf of the Medieval Warhorses project. His conclusion was that the building was originally a domestic lodging range of the mid-fifteenth century that was converted into a stable in the early modern period.

Access arrangements are another feature to consider, with the interpretation of particularly high-status buildings depending upon understanding unwritten rules of who would have been allowed access where. The knowledge of the lack of corridors in earlier buildings can help in the interpretation of many study subjects, even lowlier ones.

There is another piece of synchronicity in the discussion of the dating and phasing of buildings. An example of the care that must be

taken with the dating of different phases is my beloved Thornby Hall, where the cross wings confusingly pre-date the central hall range (the explanation being that the mid-17th century stone hall most likely replaced a run-down medieval timber-framed forerunner).

All of the practices and techniques are brought together in the example survey of a timber framed building near Malvern in Worcestershire. It is structured as a buildings archaeology report, complete with descriptions of all the phases of the building and photographs and illustrations.

In conclusion, the author ponders how many of us choose to mark the important parts of our lives in ancient buildings – from weddings to anniversaries to ordinary holidays, we head for churches, country house hotels, or Landmark Trust properties. Many aspire to live in a period property. Old buildings matter to us, and we have an appetite to find out about them.

Mandy de Belin



To illustrate the point about the odd phasing at Thornby Hall, the two cross wings were dated to about 1550, the central hall range to around 1650. (Bay windows are 1925.)

The supposition was that a decrepit, old fashioned-timber framed hall was demolished and replaced with stone. It possibly looked something like this.

Illustrations from Thornby Hall guide book, courtesy of Nagarjuna Kadampa Meditation Centre



The Hillesden Tunnel Mystery

(Probably)

SOLVED

When I reviewed 'Medieval Mythbusting' two years ago I made the observation that every village that I'd lived in or studied had erroneously claimed to have a secret tunnel. I also confided that, amazingly, the village I currently inhabit actually does have a tunnel (and I had photographs to prove it). At the time I was perplexed as to its purpose (it runs around the north and west sides of the church, not to it). I speculated that it was something to do with the fancy gardens associated with the manor house in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

Since then, I had occasion to do some more research on Hillesden, and I had a closer look at what was known about the manor houses and gardens. Hillesden's early Tudor manor was destroyed in the Civil Wars, its smaller replacement was demolished in the early nineteenth century. Both were situated immediately to the east of the church. The earlier manor was linked by a bridge to the upper storey of the sacristy, where squints allowed the family to sit in comfort away from their tenants and view the Mass. The later manor seemed to make do with a gateway and a door for access. In any case, neither building had need of a tunnel to access the church, which is the favoured explanation of most legendary tunnels (and the actual tunnel is the wrong side of the church anyway).

The formal gardens associated with the second house attracted favorable contemporary comment (from Bucks antiquarian Browne Willis and from Celia Fiennes). I knew they included a 'canal' but I was surprised to learn that the large rectangular pond in front of the current Hillesden House (built in the 1980s further down the hill) was actually the seventeenth-century canal, alive and well and full of fish. So my original theory that the tunnel might have something to do with the canal was discounted as they were much too far apart to be related.

I did discover, however, that the manor house had a large walled kitchen garden to the south of the church. This accounts for my friend Sam's tall, ancient, and expensive-to-maintain garden wall. This is also one end point of the tunnel. The other end of the tunnel is collapsed, but is close to the site of a well that is marked on the nineteenth-century OS maps. So my current theory, and I think it is a good one, is that the tunnel was built to route water from the well to the walled garden to keep the fruit and vegetables well-supplied. The tunnel now helps to route the internet to the residents of Hillesden in the form of a fibre optic cable.

Mandy de Belin



Exhibit A: the tunnel



Exhibit B: a plan of the tunnel in its environment



Exhibit C: the garden wall



Exhibit D: access from manor house to church

2026 AGM

Minutes of last year's AGM and Treasurer's Report in advance of this year's AGM



Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Friends, held on Tuesday 18 November 2025 at 19:00pm by Zoom

Present: Anne Coyne, Karen Donegani, Mary Bryceland, Michael Gilbert, Sue Hughes, Phil Batman, Heather Flack, John Parker, Mandy de Belin, Freda Raphael, Diana Musgrave, Barbara Harvey, Pam Fisher, Dave Fogg Postles, Ralph Weedon, Yvonne Cresswell, Graham Jones, John Goodacre, Andrew Wager, Anne Stones, Angela Muir, Richard Jones.

The meeting was chaired by Anne Coyne and was quorate.

Before the meeting opened, Drs Angela Muir and Richard Jones gave a brief update on The Centre for Regional and Local History. [*Not verbatim*] The University is proposing some fairly significant changes with redundancies across various areas including History. An announcement was made about 10 days ago that History is not facing compulsory redundancies but it is hoped that 25% of History staff (i.e. 6 people) would apply for voluntary severance by January 2026. If this doesn't happen compulsory redundancies would be made. Modern Languages and Film Studies are closing; Chemistry and Geography are merging. Seminars, in association with the Centre for Urban Studies, are being run in person and online. Recruitment across MA programmes has been difficult with no recruits from the 3rd year undergraduates. The use of AI in the reorganisation programme was mentioned.

1. Apologies for absence: none.

2. Approval of the minutes of the AGM held on 19 November 2024.

Proposed: Mandy de Belin, seconded: Anne Coyne. The minutes were approved.

3. Matters arising from the minutes: There were no matters arising.

4. Chair's report

Anne Coyne spoke about the report which had been circulated. There were no questions.

This is my report as Chair of the Friends for 2024/2025. When Michael Gilbert wrote his final Chair's report last year, he detailed the difficulties the Friends and the Centre had faced during the previous few years, that was the Covid pandemic and the closure of Marc Fitch House. Unfortunately, the challenges continue, and as you are all probably know in June of 2025 the University announced that History, including the Centre for Regional and Local History would be part of a change consultation process due to financial pressures facing the University. This process is still ongoing and the outcome is not likely to be known by the time of the AGM on the 18th of November.

Despite the unknowns, the committee of the Friends remain committed to promoting and supporting the study of Local History as taught by the Centre. In 2025 to date, we have supported post-graduate students and PhD researchers with Small Grant Awards to help meet research and travel costs. We would like to do more so if you know of current postgraduates or PhD candidates who are studying

some aspect of Local History at the University of Leicester, please direct them to the application form on the website.

<https://www.englishlocalhistory.org/wp/the-friends-grants-and-bursaries>

One success of 2025 is the launch of the Phythian-Adams Award; this provides financial assistance to students studying for the BA in History at Leicester University who are preparing their dissertation topics and need to visit and conduct research at an archive within the UK. Applications are made via Dr Angela Muir.

Hoskins Day was a great success again with 57 people attending. Professor Mark Gardiner gave the keynote address and the talk focused not on the rural landscape but the dwellingscape and looked at the extant medieval houses. Hoskins Day also featured two postgraduate students Chloe Phillips, researching Black Histories of Cornwall prior to 1900 and Rob Hedge, who is examining the patterns of small rural settlements in North Worcestershire and South Shropshire between the 11th and 15th centuries.

There have been two student placements this year at Spalding Gentleman's Society who are currently running the Fenland Study centre at Ayscoughfee Hall.

We have held two very interesting study days this year. The spring visit was to the Buddhist centre at Thornby Hall looking at the building and its history, followed by a tour of Naseby Battlefield. The autumn visit was to the local museum at Ashby de la Zouch, a talk about the history of Grace Dieu Priory and then followed by a tour of the ruins of Grace Dieu and the surrounding estate. Everyone who joined the study days, enjoyed these but the study days did not attract the expected numbers. The study days are designed for Friends to join so I would encourage you to come along to the next one. If you would like to visit a certain town or area for a day or examine a certain topic related to local history, please email me with those suggestions. It is your Association so please tell us what you would like the committee to run. We may have to curtail the study days if they are not supported in the future.

Our social media presence continues to expand with engagement increasing with both followers and other associations. I would like to conclude by thanking all members of the committee for their hard work throughout the past year. So, thank you to Karen, Mary, Mandy, Sue, John and Michael. As always if we have more committee members we can do more to promote the study of Local History, so please email me if you would like to volunteer. We will make some minor changes to the constitution at the AGM so please join us online as we need 20 people present to authorise the changes.

I would like to thank you all for supporting the Friends and I look forward to meeting you in person at one of our events.

5. Treasurer's report, with the Annual Accounts and the Independent Examiner's Report.

Karen Donegani spoke about the reports which had been circulated. A summary of the accounts for the year 2024-25 is provided on the AGM page of the Friends' Website. Printed copies have been sent by post to those members we cannot contact by email.

The Friends' assets, including investments at market value, were £38,299 at year end, an increase of £1,789 (5%) over the year. Our annual surplus (receipts less payments) is close to last year at £1,618, largely due to the receipt of Gift Aid funds for the period 2022-24 and a one-off donation from the sale of second-hand books from a member of university staff. Money in the bank has increased to £26,433 compared to £24,814 at the start of the year.

Hoskins Day costs were again kept to a minimum as the Centre for Regional and Local History paid for the refreshments provided. Our two study days, at Thorny/Naseby in April and at Grace Dieu Priory in September, made a loss. (Some income and costs for the latter study day will be included in 2025-26 accounts). Administrative costs are higher than last year, largely due to the provision of a Zoom Pro

account for the AGM, committee meetings, and talks. The overall cost of printing and distributing the annual Newsletter has reduced significantly by digital publishing.

The number of requests for student support grants was a little higher than last year but only £900 was paid out. Research support grants are now available to any University of Leicester BA or MA History student or PhD candidate who undertakes regional or local history research.

Our financial position is sound, and we can meet our financial obligations for the coming year. In view of our lack of contractual commitments, we do not have a reserves policy at the present time – all funds are available for meeting our charity objectives.

I would like to thank Dave Postles for volunteering to undertake an Internal Review of the end of year accounts.

6. Adoption of the Treasurer's Report and the Independent Examiner's Report

Proposed: Anne Coyne, seconded: John Parker. Approved.

7. Changes to the Constitution

John Parker introduced the proposed changes which had been made available with the AGM papers. Over the past year he had been looking at reviewing the Constitution using one of the Charities' Commission templates; however, with possible changes to the Centre, the Committee felt it would be better to wait. However, Section 9 is causing problems:

1. Section 9: the 5 year rule. Unless this changes the current secretary would have to stand down and there is no replacement. As a small committee we aren't able to rotate jobs.
2. Rewrite the whole of Section 9. This is confusing, ambiguous and open to interpretation. The Charities Act refers to *Trustees* as the people who manage the organisation. Our Constitution doesn't mention Trustees but refers to *Officers and Committee Members*. The Constitution doesn't specify the roles, but merely lists them.
3. Section 11: to enable nominations to be made via email as well as by post.

Proposal: Sections 9 and 11 to be re-written as detailed :*[The current Constitution Sections 9 and 11 are in the Appendix at the end of the minutes]*

A Proposal to Amend Section '9.0 COMMITTEE' of the Friends of the Centre for English Local History Constitution.

9.0 COMMITTEE should state:

9.0 COMMITTEE

The Association and its property shall be managed and administered by a committee comprising of the officers and other members elected in accordance with this constitution. The officers and other members of the committee shall be the trustees of the Friends and in this constitution are together called 'the trustees'

9.1 The Committee shall have the following officers

9.1.1 Chair

9.1.2 Secretary

9.1.3 Treasurer

and members

9.1.4 a minimum of two and a maximum of six additional members.

- 9.2** Each of the trustees shall retire with effect from the conclusion of the annual general meeting next after his or her appointment but shall be eligible for re-election at that annual general meeting. All trustees shall be members of the Association.
- 9.3** The committee shall have the power to invite individuals to its meetings. Such persons shall not be entitled to vote. Such individuals may be:
- 9.3.1** Representatives from the staff and student bodies of the University of Leicester.
- 9.3.2** Co-opted individuals having special skill or knowledge in relation to the consideration of matters where such special skill or knowledge would be likely to be of assistance.
- 9.3.3** Other individuals on an ad hoc basis.
- 9.4** The Committee shall have the general management and direction of funds and affairs of the Association, and in particular (but without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing):
- 9.4.1** May nominate any Friend to serve on another body;
- 9.4.2** May pay the whole or any part of the reasonable out-of-pocket expenses of any Officer or Friend in or about the execution of his or her function and duties on behalf of the Association;
- 9.4.3** May fill casual vacancies from time to time from its membership;
- 9.4.4** May appoint from time to time such sub-Committees from its membership as may be necessary or desirable to carry out its business.
- 9.5** No member of the Committee shall acquire any interest in property belonging to the Association or receive remuneration or be interested (otherwise than as an officer or member of the Committee) in any contract entered by the Committee.

**A Proposal to Amend Section ‘11.0 NOMINATIONS’
of the
Friends of the Centre for English Local History Constitution.**

11.0 NOMINATIONS should state:

11.0 NOMINATIONS

11.1 The Association in general meeting shall elect the officers and the other trustees. Nominations for trustees and officers must be notified to the Secretary by email or post at least seven days before the Annual General Meeting, along with the names and contact details of a proposer and a seconder. If an election is necessary, voting will be by secret ballot.

Proposed: John Parker, seconded Karen Donegani. Agreed.

8. Election of officers and committee

Graham Jones started a discussion on the titles of officers, committee members and Trustees. He commented that some roles are no longer defined e.g. Events organiser – it was explained that they are now organised by committee members as individuals or as a group. It was clarified that all the committee members, as they are involved in the management of the organisation, are Trustees. John Parker mentioned an ongoing discussion with Dr Pam Fisher re the numbers involved on the committee. He was also happy to correspond with members and take ideas on board.

The changes to the Constitution having been agreed Mary Bryceland did not have to resign as Secretary under the 5 year rule.

Officer	Standing	Proposed	Seconded
Chair	Anne Coyne	Karen Donegani	Mary Bryceland
Secretary	Mary Bryceland	Karen Donegani	John Parker
Treasurer (and membership secretary)	Karen Donegani	John Parker	Michael Gilbert
Editor of the Newsletter	Mandy de Belin	Sue Hughes	Anne Coyne
IT coordinator	John Parker	Michael Gilbert	Mandy de Belin
Committee	Sue Hughes	Mandy de Belin	Karen Donegani
Committee	Michael Gilbert	Mary Bryceland	Sue Hughes
Committee	Vacant		
Committee	Vacant		
Committee	Vacant		
Student Representative	N/A		
Student Representative	N/A		
Centre Representative	N/A		

The committee was proposed en bloc by Freda Raphael, seconded by Heather Flack. All were elected.

9. Appointment of the Independent Examiner

Karen Donegani proposed Dave Postles for the role and was seconded by Graham Jones. Agreed.

10. Any other business

Graham asked for thanks to be recorded to Angela and Richard for keeping the Centre going - agreed by everyone!

The meeting closed at 8pm.

Friends of the Centre for English Local History
Registered Charity no. 1073528

Receipts and Payments Account for the year to 30 September 2025

Final, as reviewed by Independent Examiner

Receipts and payments		2025	2024
Receipts		£UK	£UK
	Donations	1,629.00	1,815.00
	Gift Aid payments	844.93	0.00
	Dividends & Interest	1,102.98	1,097.22
	Publications & 2nd hand book sales	359.57	115.40
	Study Day tickets	425.00	570.00
	Total	4,361.48	3,597.62
Payments			
	Student Support	899.84	714.62
	Admin/IT costs	490.44	201.08
	CRLH Library support	104.64	159.54
	Publications	0.00	168.00
	Newsletter	125.67	181.19
	AGM Expenses	27.22	40.60
	Hoskins Day costs	127.28	38.21
	Study Days costs	968.00	531.51
	Total	2,743.09	2,034.75
	Deficit/surplus (receipts less payments)	1,618.39	1,562.87
Excess of income over expenditure			
	Opening funds at 1st October 2024	35,459.84	33,896.97
	Deficit/surplus (receipts less payments)	1,618.39	1,562.87
	Closing funds at 30th September 2024	37,078.23	35,459.84

Breakdown of closing funds at 30th September 2025

Bank balances	Cash	0.00	0.00
	Natwest Bank Current Account	2,893.44	4,059.37
	Cambridge & Counties savings account	23,539.76	20,755.44
	Sub-total	26,433.20	24,814.81
Investments			
	<i>Investment Assets at cost:</i>		
	IFSL CAF ESG Income and Growth Fund	10,645.03	10,645.03
Total funds (Bank balances plus investment assets at cost)		37,078.23	35,459.84

Closing assets at 30th September 2025

Bank balances	26,433.20	24,814.81
<i>Market value of investments:</i>		
IFSL CAF ESG Income and Growth Fund	11,866.31	11,695.15
Total	38,299.51	36,509.96

Friends of the Centre for English Local History
(Registered Charity no. 1073528)



**FRIENDS OF THE CENTRE FOR ENGLISH LOCAL HISTORY, HYPIR Post Room,
Attenborough Tower, University of Leicester, University Road, LEICESTER LE1 7RH**