

As usual, my thanks go to Jan Broadway for contacting contributors and distributing the digital version of the newsletter and also to John Chandler for the excellent production and to all the contributors, without whom the newsletter would not exist. We hope you find our thirteenth newsletter interesting and informative. If you have any comments or further ideas, please let me know: [dhaldred@btinternet.com](mailto:dhaldred@btinternet.com).

*David Aldred*

## Report from the Trust

Well, that wasn't quite the way we all expected the first half of 2020 to go, was it? We'd rather hoped to be concentrating on writing up past history, but

## Welcome from the Editor

Welcome to our thirteenth newsletter, keeping you in touch with the work of the County History Trust. We hope you have kept safe and well during the past five months. Despite the difficulties caused by Covid 19, the work of the Trust and its historians has continued, albeit at an enforced lower level than before. However this has not prevented us from looking ahead, as James our chair explains below. Although this newsletter is shorter than usual, it still contains just as much variety of content.



*The Brewery Centre, Cheltenham High Street (see below, pages 6-7)*

# VCH Gloucestershire

## Newsletter 13 July 2020

instead we've been all living through a modern historic episode whose local impact—once we can get a proper perspective on it—will I'm sure get duly mentioned in the VCH volumes we have in progress.

For the Trust's work, the main impact of the pandemic has been in two areas. Firstly the inability to access archives in person, which has affected loads of us, but most acutely our editors both paid and unpaid. The extra online facilities granted by various libraries and repositories have of course been very welcome, but haven't really made up for the lack of direct access to individual documents outside the established classes of record.

Secondly, the ability to make or develop new relationships. Emails and online meetings work well enough with people you already know, but it's much harder to explore new work possibilities if you're not sitting down face to face with someone, or able to walk the territory with them.

So, some things have gone slowly, or not got going at all, but on the other hand, enforced isolation has meant that a number of pending tasks have made better progress, especially if one had the foresight to have a hoard of archive images or notes stored on the computer, waiting for that rainy day.

Despite the setbacks, we have reasons to be cheerful in all three project areas.

Vol. 14: just after the January newsletter came out, the VCH central office put us in touch with someone from West Littleton, a small parish up on the Cotswold scarp just south of the M4, which is due to be included in the South Gloucestershire volume. Residents there wanted to help fund VCH work, and John Chandler and I had a preliminary chat with them in February. Lockdown then made it rather difficult to take it forward quite as planned, and we had no in-house person to do the work. However, using the money now very generously pledged by West Littleton residents, we have recently agreed to buy in some research effort from the neighbouring VCH trust in Oxfordshire, which will mean we can expect a start on the work this autumn (always assuming archive access is once more possible by then). Simon Draper, known to many of you, will be doing this research, and has already done a scoping report identifying the issues to be explored, and the likely sources. We see this as very positive development, as it releases the pause button on Vol. 14, and may lead to ideas for tackling the other small parishes still awaiting

attention in that area.

Vol. 15: even without archive access, quite a lot has been happening both on Cheltenham itself and on neighbouring Swindon village, where Sally Self's 'Bedlam' project has taken a thorough (and unprecedented?) look at the development of a largely post-war edge-of-town trading and industrial estate. (See below for Sally's latest research - Ed)

Cheltenham itself is now several steps closer to completion. Jan Broadway has drafted sections on post-war Local Government, Topography and Development, Social History and Economic Activity, and we strongly encourage anyone with an interest in the town to look at these and make constructive comments (with references please!). As far as draft text goes, that is almost 'it' for Cheltenham proper. There is of course still much to do, including mapping to illustrate the whole account. **If there's anyone out there with cartographic skills who'd like to help, please please get in touch.**

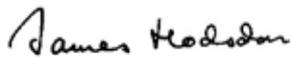
Leckhampton was a specific victim of lockdown. In February, we'd been put in touch with a young post-doc in Bristol who was prepared to tackle the knotty medieval history of Leckhampton, and she did a very promising short scoping study. But it was impossible for us to meet up, and in the meantime she had another more substantial work opportunity which she was well advised to accept. Thinking caps back on again...

Vol. 16: Alex Craven has done well in difficult lockdown conditions to keep up a flow of drafts on Bagendon and Daglingworth, which are nearly ready for the website for comments, though we all recognise it's not going as quickly as wished. On the plus side, Professor Tim Darvill was able to use enforced home time to prepare and deliver his promised essay on the pre-history of the Cirencester area, which we think will be a valuable (unprecedented again?) addition to the Introductory section of Vol 16. This is now online at <https://www.vchglosacademy.org/drafts/prehistory.pdf> and well worth a read. (See below for the Introduction – Ed) Again, it deserves a map; we may have an archaeology specialist lined up to do that one.

Regrettably, our fundraising efforts have had to take a back seat in recent months. Understandably, people's thoughts and charitable instincts have been focused on matters other than historical research. But we shall regroup in due course, and hope that we can use the progress that has been made over the last six months as further

arguments for the help we need to ‘finish the job’ – or to be more accurate, finish all three of the jobs outlined above.

With best wishes to all



James Hodsdon  
Chairman

## From our County Co-ordinator

### Cheltenham post-1945

During the lockdown I have been busy writing up the final stage of Cheltenham’s history, taking our account of the borough from the end of the Second World War to the spring of 2020. Fortunately I had managed to do quite a lot of the necessary research before the archives and libraries closed their doors. For the modern period there is also a substantial amount of material available online. Unfortunately there is a gap in the online editions of the *Gloucestershire Echo* between 1950 and 2008. So, once the Hub reopens, I will need to consult the microfilms there. While there is still work to be done and some references could be improved, the results of my labours are available for initial comments at <https://www.vchglosacademy.org/Cheltenham1945.html>. Please let me know, what I’ve omitted or got wrong.

One of the interesting aspects of post-war history that plays out with particular resonance in Cheltenham is the friction created by the competing demands of modernization and conservation. In 1963 an article in the *Birmingham Post* headlined ‘Prosperity – Without the Royal Gout’ celebrated the replacement of Cheltenham Spa, ‘a place for the elderly to take their rest’ with Cheltenham, a ‘centre for vigorous industry, thriving commerce, and pulsating social life’. Among the photographs illustrating the article was a view of the west side of the recently widened Pittville Street with its ‘new shopping centre’. A similar view of Pittville Street appears in a contemporary town guide. This period in the 1960s saw ambitious plans to redevelop Cheltenham’s central area, championed by Charles Irving – then an alderman and later the town’s MP and a ‘prominent believer in progress’. The proposed development, which was in the spirit if not on the same scale as the post-war development of Coventry, was pushed by the county council and initially approved by the borough council. However, after it met considerable, vociferous

opposition at a public inquiry, it was dropped and a new plan drawn up by consultants. The revised plan produced in 1971 pleased no-one. It threatened too many buildings to satisfy the ‘implacable conservationists’ without allowing the ‘progressors’ a free hand to develop industry and adapt Regency buildings willy nilly for offices. By this time the tide was turning in the direction of the conservationists, as demonstrated two years later by the designation of almost the whole of the historic centre of Cheltenham as a conservation area under the provisions of the 1971 Town and Country Planning Act.



View from the Eagle Star Tower 1978

In my collection of Gloucestershire postcards there is one from the late 1970s, which presents Cheltenham as Alderman Irving wished. Taken from the Eagle Star Tower (1968), it shows the view to the west, taking in the Quadrangle (1970) on the corner of Imperial Square, St James House (1976-7) and in the far distance the gasometer on Gloucester Road. Timothy Mowl described the Quadrangle as the ‘most ingeniously destructive addition to Cheltenham’s streets’, as it is ‘so unassuming and tedious no one bothers to hate it’. He was no kinder to the slightly earlier ‘coarse concrete’ attempts by Cheltenham’s progressives to improve the town’s shopping facilities. While they lack Regency elegance, such buildings represent an important stage in Cheltenham’s transition from its ‘curry and colonels’ past into its vibrant and multi-faceted present.

Jan Broadway  
Co-ordinator, VCH Gloucestershire

## Updates from the Volumes

### *Volume 14: South Gloucestershire*

Further to our proposed research into West Littleton parish, John Chandler has been out and about getting to know the area.

You've all been to West Littleton, just about – not the village, but the parish – although you were probably not aware of it. Down the A46 towards Bath, and just past the entrance to Dyrham, there you are, driving along the parish boundary, with West Littleton on your left. It is one of a group of three parishes that sit together, with intertwined histories, that are to be included in our Vol. 14. Acton Turville is another (you may not have been there so often), and Tormarton is the third (everyone could find their way there, and does – M4 J18 if you need a hint).



*West Littleton's church of St James was mostly rebuilt 1855-56, although the mid-thirteenth bellcote was retained*

We all think we know an area because we drive through it, but to get to understand a place, to enjoy and appreciate it, the first essential is to turn off the highway, meander down the lane and park at the village green by what used to be the phone box. Then go for a walk, with a map. So, on my way to



*Slait Lane West Littleton: an ancient trackway used as a modern parish boundary*

somewhere else, I spent a couple of pleasant hours of a sunny July morning venturing slowly along the lanes and footpaths of West Littleton on foot, with camera and OS Explorer sheet 155 in hand.

You will have read above that our friend and Gloucestershire historian Simon Draper (on hire from VCH Oxfordshire) is to research the parish history of West Littleton. He will be doing the 'difficult' bits – landownership and religion, the arcane worlds of manorial and ecclesiastical history – but I shall contribute the introductory section, on landscape and roads and buildings. Hence the first of numerous explorations. And this sort of thing can't be done through a car window. It has to be done slowly, peering over gates, looking at views, and generally making the Neighbourhood Watch slightly jittery. W H Auden, describing John Betjeman's enthusiasm for places, coined the word 'topophilia', and added: 'topophilia, however, cannot survive at velocities greater than that of a somewhat rusty bicycle.'

John Chandler  
Consultant Editor

## Volume 15: Cheltenham and surrounding parishes

### THE SMELL OF SWEET VIOLETS

The research for 'It's Bedlam Down There – the History of Kingsditch, a Cheltenham Trading Estate', as part of the history of Swindon parish in Vol. 15, has brought a number of interesting particulars to light. Some of these are rather unsavoury, such as bursting sewers on Tewkesbury Road, the flushing of water from the processes of the Dairy and Box Company into Wyman's Brook and polluted wells as the source for drinking water at the labourers' cottages on Kingsditch Lane.

Other material has been more savoury and bringing the Victorian street cry of 'buy my sweet violets' to mind. In the 19th century, violet flowers were popular for use in toiletries or candied for inclusion in and on cakes, pastries, chocolates and as sweeteners of the breath. They were also sold, in small tightly wrapped bunches, by flower sellers on street corners. Two valuations have come to light for Violet Farm, a market garden and orchard adjacent to Tewkesbury Road. They arise from litigation during 1890 to 1910 and have given a valuable insight into Swindon Village's gardens and in this

particular case how the farm acquired its name.<sup>1</sup>

The land to the west of Cheltenham and south of Swindon Village was mainly pasture with market gardens and orchards. During the 19th century, with the rapid expansion of Cheltenham's population, the need for fresh supplies of vegetables, fruit and flowers increased. The valuations of Violet Farm, at the end of this period, give an insight into the range of crops produced on Swindon parish's light, sandy soil. The farm's orchards were extensive: the crop in 1897 was valued at £107 and in 1910 there were 2,040 apple, pear, plum and damson trees with a value of £410. Also grown were gooseberries (3,459 bushes), nuts, cobs and filberts, 'cultivated' brambles, eight espaliered cherries and strawberries. Vegetables were more limited with 33 patches of potatoes, valued at £432. The time of year may reflect the lack of other root crops, though the soil type would lead one to expect carrots, turnips and swede. There were also two rows of celery, possibly grown in the heated greenhouse.



Violet Villa (in green), Tewkesbury Road, Cheltenham. OS 25<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1896-1939. Courtesy of Know Your Place <https://maps.bristol.gov.uk/kyp/?edition=glos>

The name 'Violet Villa' indicated the main 'crop' and it is possible that this market garden was the main supplier of violets to the town. Grown in two areas of '4 patches' and 'about an acre', the total value of the violet plants was estimated as £64. Other flowers were smaller numbers of roses and pinks. Although unclear, the gardener, a Mr Smith, may

<sup>1</sup> Gloucestershire Archives, D2025/box786/bundle 6

have also supplied a few 'border plants' and bulbs to local gardens.

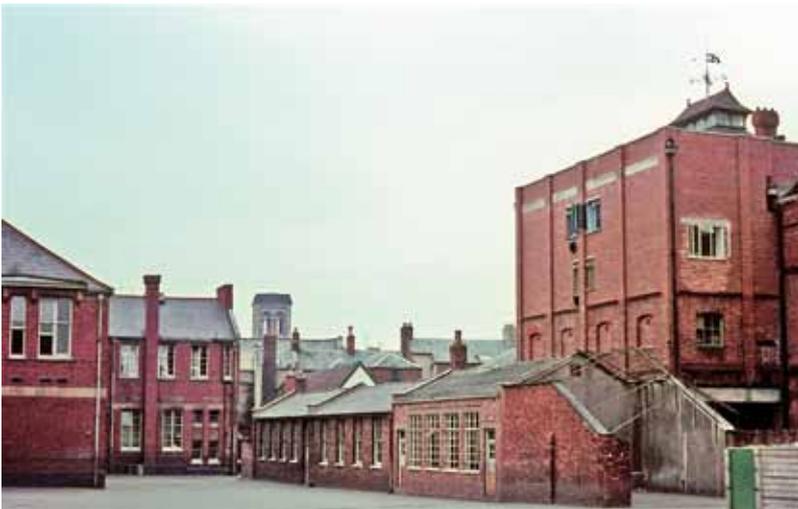
The soil type would, in dry years, have dried out quickly, a fact reflected by the three wells and the 100 feet of irrigation. It also is apparent that the land was over-stocked with fruit trees. The claim for compensation at the end of the 25-year lease listed the trees, row by row, and indicated that alternate rows should be grubbed out and the remaining trees thinned. This amounted to around two thirds of the trees which included the '90 rotten trees.' It also appears that the farm was in poor shape. The garden of four acres, three rods and 22 perches was described, for compensation purposes, as 'overgrowing and improperly planted' and that Mr Smith had failed to 'properly clear and manure the land leaving it in a foul condition.' The landlord was the town's long serving Member of Parliament, Sir James Tynte Agg Gardner. A final settlement of the

claims and counter claims of Agg Gardner and the estate of Edward Smith was only reached when the Board of Trade was asked to arbitrate. The initial claim of over £700 was reduced to around £300, with both parties having to pay their legal costs.

*Sally Self*

## THE CHANGING FACE OF CHELTENHAM POST-1945

Regrettably the second thoughts on the redevelopment of post-war Cheltenham came too late to save the fine nineteenth-century building of the boys' grammar school which fronted on to





the High Street, although the red brick classrooms behind it were of little or no architectural value. All was demolished in 1965, replaced by a 'coarse concrete' row of shops ('aesthetically crippled' in the words of Timothy Mowl) which in turn has been replaced in the last decade by the Brewery Centre.

David Aldred

## Volume 16: Cirencester and surrounding parishes

We realised when we began work on Vol. 16 for Cirencester and its surroundings that prehistoric and Roman archaeology would figure more prominently than in most VCH volumes. With that in mind we commissioned two specialists to write the appropriate sections of text, and we have now received one of these, on the area's prehistory, from Professor Timothy Darvill of Bournemouth University. As a taster we are printing the first introductory paragraph of his contribution. Coincidentally, the work of another eminent Gloucestershire prehistorian, Tom Moore of Durham University, has just been published. Weighing in at a hefty 2.5kg and almost 700 colour pages of A4, *A Biography of Power* is the summation of nearly 40 years of research and excavations on the Iron Age *oppidum* of Bagendon, Cirencester's precursor. The parish of Bagendon is currently being researched for Vol. 16 by Alex Craven, so the appearance of this report could not be more timely. But its scope is much wider than just the later parish, and has profound implications for our understanding of the landscape and early history of the whole area covered by Vol. 16 – and beyond.

## PREHISTORY IN THE CIRENCESTER AREA

The Churn Valley and adjacent limestone uplands in the ten parishes considered in this volume were extensively if sparsely occupied during prehistoric times, with the scale and extent of settlement increasingly considerably after about 700 BC. Archaeologically the area is extremely rich, but understanding these early communities draws on many different strands of evidence. Investigations by antiquarians working here from the eighteenth century onwards are important, and one of the earliest recorded excavations in Gloucestershire was by Anthony Freston at the Hoar Stone long barrow, Duntisbourne Abbots, in 1806.<sup>1</sup> More recently, systematic surveys of upstanding monuments,<sup>2</sup> fieldwalking,<sup>3</sup> aerial photography<sup>4</sup>, geophysical survey, excavation, and the scientific study of finds and materials each provide a wealth of complementary information. Ongoing research

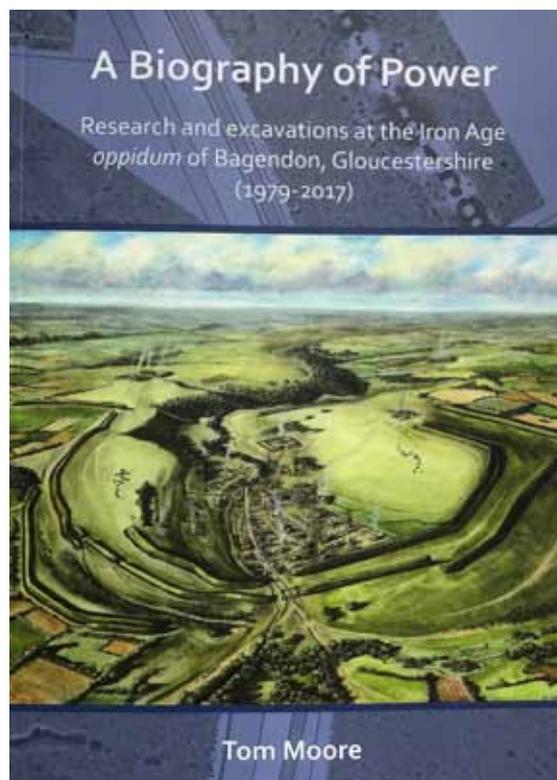
- 1 Freston, A., 1812, [An account of a tumulus opened in an estate of Matthew Baillie MD, in the parish of Duntisbourne Abbots in Gloucestershire.] *Archaeologia* 16, 361–2.
- 2 O'Neil, H. & Grinsell, L.V., 1960, Gloucestershire barrows. TBGAS 79(1), 3–149; RCHME [Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England], 1976, *Ancient and historical monuments in the county of Gloucester. Vol. I. Iron Age and Romano-British monuments in the Gloucestershire Cotswolds*. London: HMSO.
- 3 Holgate, R., 1988, *Neolithic settlement of the Thames basin*. Oxford: British Archaeological Reports British Series 194.
- 4 Leech, R., 1977, *The upper Thames Valley in Gloucestershire and Wiltshire: an archaeological survey of the river gravels*. Bristol: Committee for Rescue Archaeology in Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset (Survey 4).

right: front cover of *A Biography of Power*,  
by Tom Moore, published by Archaeopress, July 2020,  
ISBN 978-1-78969-534-2, £85  
(described on page 7 above)

projects around Bagendon,<sup>1</sup> and on Abbey Home Farm in Baunton and Preston parishes,<sup>2</sup> contribute many insights. But the single most important contribution in recent years has come from commercial archaeology projects such as those connected with upgrading the A417/419,<sup>3</sup> the expansion of Cirencester,<sup>4</sup> and gravel extraction in the Cotswold Water Park.<sup>5</sup>

Timothy Darvill

- 1 Moore, T., 2014, Excavations at two Iron Age enclosures within Bagendon 'Oppidum', Gloucestershire (2012–14): Interim Report. *Glevensis* 47: 12–21; and see this volume.
- 2 Darvill, T. & Smith, M., 2018, Baunton, Sisters Long Barrow, Abbey Home Farm. *TBGAS* 136: 317, with earlier references.
- 3 Mudd, A., Williams, R.J. & Lupton, A., 1999, *Excavations alongside Roman Ermine Street, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire. The archaeology of the A419/A417 Swindon to Gloucester Road Scheme*. Oxford: Oxford Archaeological Unit (2 volumes).
- 4 Biddulph, E. & Welsh, K., 2011. *Cirencester before corinium. Excavations at Kingshill North, Cirencester, Gloucestershire*. Oxford: Oxford Archaeology (Thames Valley Monograph 34); Simmonds, A., Biddulph, E. & Welsh, K., 2018, *In the shadow of Corinium. Prehistoric and Roman occupation at Kingshill South, Cirencester, Gloucestershire*. Oxford: Oxford Archaeology (Thames Valley Monograph 41); Young, D. & Erskine, J., 2012, Two prehistoric enclosures at The Beeches Playing Field, London Road, Cirencester, Gloucestershire. *TBGAS* 130: 31–62.
- 5 Morgi, A., Schreve, D. & White, M., 2011, *The Thames through time. The archaeology of the gravel terraces of the upper and middle Thames. Early prehistory to 1500 BC*. Oxford: Oxford Archaeology (Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph 32); Lambrick, G. & Robinson, M., 2009, *The Thames through time. The archaeology of the gravel terraces of the upper and middle Thames. Later prehistory to 1500 BC –AD50*. Oxford: Oxford Archaeology (Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph 29).



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