Victoria County History of Somerset Newsletter

Issue 19

Summer 2022

Welcome to the nineteenth edition of our newsletter. We hope you enjoy it.

Please pass this newsletter on to others. If you are not on our mailing list and would like to receive future copies of the newsletter please let us know by contacting us at vch@swheritage.org.uk.

County Editor's Report

There is now more Taunton material on the VCH section of the South West Heritage Trust website https://swheritage.org.uk/somerset-victoria-county-history/

These sections will be updated and replaced as work progresses and hopefully you will find them interesting. We have Julian Orbach and Chris Webster working on the Taunton architectural and archaeological sections, and Alex Craven has been employed to work part-time on the parish of Staplegrove.

Now that winter has given way to spring and summer some of us look forward to getting out and exploring our neighbourhood and further afield. Although Covid 19 is still with us we are beginning to enjoy more real-life events. The VCH is no exception and we are resuming our talks and walks.

Signs of the times: Taunton's 1947 bus station, 2022 *Mary Siraut*

Talks have been given on the history of the VCH and of the 'lost' parish of Bishops Hull Within. James Bond will take a group round Cleeve Abbey on 25 June.

St John's church and the former parish of Bishops Hull Within SWHT

You will also find news of events and all our past newsletters on the webpages. Information and booking for our next VCH lecture will be put on the site as soon as we have finalised the details and it will be circulated to members of our mailing list.

Meanwhile for those of you who missed Michael Wood's talk on Athelstan, the king who united England and established the medieval monarchy, there is an article summarising the talk.

Other topics include the Burney family of Bath, some aspects of industry and craft in Somerset and the architectural legacy of Somerset's industrial past. The last are a poignant and fitting homage to Brian Murless, an expert on Somerset's industrial past and a supporter of the VCH who sadly died a few months ago. He will be much missed.

Somerset VCH Annual Lecture by Michael Wood

Athelstan First King of the English

We were delighted to welcome the well known historian Michael Wood for this year's annual lecture. He began his webinar talk by showing the importance of this king, the first to claim to be the king of the English, and even later in his reign to be king of the whole of Britain. Michael illustrated his talk with some wonderful images of manuscripts and objects, some of which probably belonged to Athelstan, as well as modern book illustrations and stained glass windows.

He delved into Athelstan's background as grandson to Alfred the Great in a changing pattern of politics in Britain. Athelstan was separated from his mother when his father Edward made a dynastic marriage and was brought up by his aunt Æthelflæd Lady of Mercia, which may have influenced his later character as a pious and just king who was both a warlord and a learned man. He shared the devotion of his aunt and uncle to St Oswald at Gloucester.

Although Alfred the Great appears to have intended Athelstan to be king it was his half brother Alfred who became king shortly before their father Edward's death.

Edward father of Athelstan

Alfred died 16 days later at Oxford and Athelstan was elected king by the Mercians although he had enemies and rivals. His coronation was delayed and took place at Kingston rather than Winchester.

We learned how from the rather uncertain beginning of his reign he gathered round him earls, clergy and others not only from Wessex and Mercia but from Ireland and the continent. Although he never married and chose his half brother Edwin as heir, he promoted a series of dynastic marriages for his sisters, which created alliances and also gave rise to much splendid gift giving.

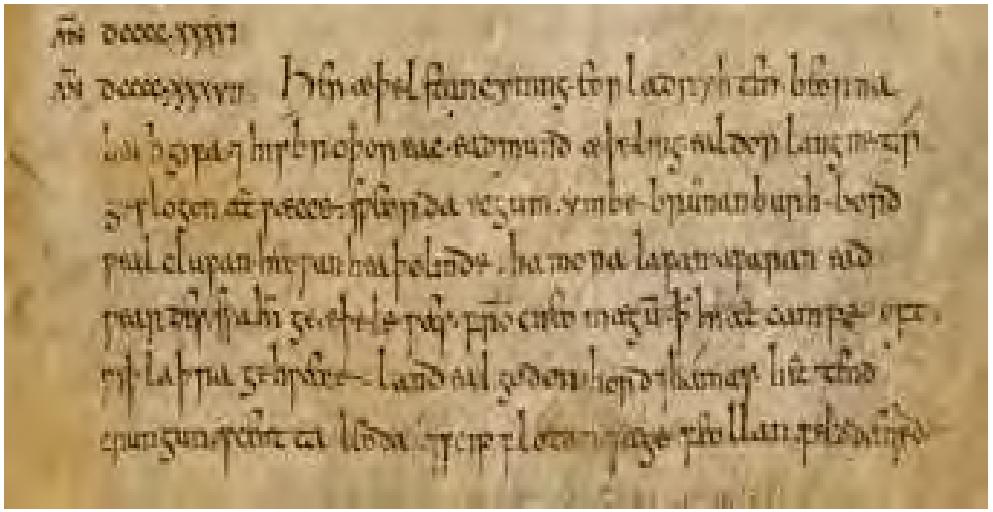
Edith's marriage to Sitric king of York secured peace for a while but she was abandoned in 927 and then widowed. That led to further hostilities resulting in Athelstan securing control of Northumbria. The remaining kings of England, Scotland and Wales gave allegiance to him and he became the first king of all England although ruling in the north by proxies.

Another sister Ædgyth became queen of Germany and a burial uncovered in Magdeburg is almost certainly hers.

Coffin of Ædgyth at Magdeburg

Athelstan was an itinerant king and travelled widely around his realm often with his earls meeting local leaders, holding assemblies in several places and law giving. He was reputedly a patron of literature and his psalter contains copies of Greek church texts written in the Latin alphabet.

After a period of relative peace his reign ended with six years of warfare in which he was again victorious, but during which his heir Edwin was drowned possibly on the king's orders. In 934 Constantine king of the Scots and Eugenius king of Strathclyde broke their treaty with Athelstan and war broke out. An Irish fleet sailed up the Humber and most of Northern England and Scotland was in turmoil. Eventually in 937 Athelstan was victorious in the terrible battle of Brunanburh. Forty years of peace are said to have followed but Athelstan himself died 27 October 939 aged only *c*. 44 and was buried at Malmsbury.



Poem on the battle

Michael then answered several questions including the still unsolved mystery of the site of battle of Brunanburh or Brunnanburh.

Thanks were given to Michael for a fascinating talk.

The Burneys in Bath

Many will know of the link between Bath and Fanny Burney, the novelist, who is said to have come to the city five times: firstly in 1767, with her father on the way back from Hotwells and secondly possibly in 1777 as she mentioned Bath in her novel *Evelina* (1778). In 1780 she stayed for three months with Mr and Mrs Thrale and their daughter Queenie and in 1791 Bath was part of a tour she made of the West Country with her friend Mrs Ord. From 1815 to 1818 she lived in Bath with her husband Alexander d'Arblay and their son. General d'Arblay died in 1818, and was buried in Walcot Cemetery. Fanny returned to London, where she died in 1840, but was buried with her husband at Walcot.

Fanny Burney by her brother Edward

From 1817 Charles Rousseau Burney and his wife Esther, who were first cousins, were resident at Bath. Charles Rousseau Burney (1747-1819) was the nephew of Dr Charles Burney, being the son of Dr Burney's elder brother Richard Burney (1723-92). Charles Rousseau became known as a musical virtuoso and harpsichordist. He took over his uncle's pupils when Charles Burney went on his travels in 1770 and succeeded him as organist of the Oxford Chapel, Vere Street, in 1784. He even played in 1791 to his uncle's friend William Beckford, who was in gaol in the Fleet prison for

Charles Rousseau Burney c. 1780 by Thomas Gainsborough

He married his cousin, Esther Burney (1749-1832) at St Paul, Covent Garden, on 29 September 1770. She was the eldest daughter of Charles Burney and sister of Fanny, and was also a distinguished harpsichordist. She often played duets with her husband and they were sometimes engaged to play at private parties, such as those arranged by Mrs Ord.

Esther inherited £1000 in 1814 from her father and the family, which had been living at Turnham Green west of London. They moved to Bath in 1817 and lived in Larkhall Place. Charles Rousseau and Esther were aged over 70 when they moved, so maybe the move was made to be near her sister. Charles Rousseau died in 1819 and was buried in the churchyard of St John the Baptist, Batheaston, where there is a monument to him. Esther died in February 1832 at Chelsea Cottage, Bath and was buried with her husband and daughter Frances at Batheaston.

They had a big family. The children were clearly very bright and in 1792 they produced a *Juvenile Magazine*, the six surviving issues of which included stories, poems, plays, puzzles, essays and news items contributed by family and friends. This collaborative effort was inspired by one of the first periodicals ever published that was directed wholly at children, John Marshall's production of the same name, the *Juvenile Magazine* of 1788.

Hannah Maria Burney (1772-1856) married Anthony Bourdois, a Frenchman., in 1800. They lived in France but when he died on 7 August 1806 of a liver complaint she returned to England through Germany and Holland, due to the British blockade of French coast, arriving in London after a journey of over 600 miles. She bought a small house at Batheaston, 2 miles from Bath, to which she took her sister Sophia to live with her. She later lived at 19 Wimpole Street where she died 16 May 1856.

St John the Baptist, Batheaston

Richard Allen Burney (1773-1836), eldest son of Charles Rousseau, had become a very fine player on the pianoforte as early as 1795. Dr Charles Burney had intended to will to his grandson a MS folio volume of Voluntaries, but said "*But this Grandson has long out-grown such old fashioned Studies and can play extempore and compose for himself and others more modern and better music."* So Dr Burney suggested it might be sold. In the same year Richard was offered a living by the bishop of Winchester, if he would like to undergo the necessary preparation.

He entered Magdalene College, Oxford and was ordained in 1798. He was rector of Rimpton, Somerset, from 1802 to 1829 but left the parish to a resident curate in 1815 because of the 'pernicious quality of the waters of Rimpton'. However, he returned later and lived there until his death 29 March 1836. In 1815-16 he was also stipendiary curate at Brightwell in the Salisbury diocese, he was vicar of Buckland Dinham from 1817-29 and from 1817 was also domestic chaplain to the 2nd Viscount Dungannon (1763-1837).

He got into an argument with his aunt Frances over her editing of Dr Burney's *Memoirs*. He had applied in 1807 to the College of Arms for Armorial Bearings, and was sensitive about the humble origins of his grandmother, Esther Sleepe, the first wife of Dr Charles Burney. Richard Allen noted that despite having been married for 20 years, he had been unable to discuss Esther Sleepe with his wife, such was his embarrassment. His wife was Elizabeth Layton Williams of Marston Magna whom he married in 1811 and by whom he had three daughters Clara, Cecilia and Emma, and a son Henry.

Charles Crisp Burney (1777-91) had been accepted by his uncle, William Sandford, as an apprentice physician or surgeon, but soon after ran away to London and was later recruited as a soldier by the East India Company. He contracted dysentery and leg ulcers in Sumatra and he died in Calcutta on 24 December 1791, very soon after arriving there. He was aged 14.

Frances Burney (1776-1828). Naturally intellectual, she built up library that included books in French, German, Latin, Greek, and Italian. She was the author of: *Tragic Dramas, chiefly intended for Representation in Private families, to which is added 'Aristodemus', a Tragedy from the Italian of Vincenzo Monti.* This is sometimes wrongly attributed to her aunt.

She became a governess in 1794 in the household of Lord Beverley and later in the households of the attorney-general Sir Thomas Plumer (1753-1824) and Sir Henry Russell (1751-1836), chief justice at Bengal. She suffered attacks of jaundice throughout her life, and died on Friday 28 March, 1828. She was buried at Batheaston Church, near her father.

Sophia Elizabeth Burney (1777-1856), encouraged by her aunt Frances Burney, gathered her creative writing into at least three anthologies of works (with some overlap) purportedly written at the age of thirteen, and dedicated them to her aunt. She died 10 September 1856, in Wimpole Street, London. Presumably she had been living with her sister Hannah Maria Bourdois, who died the previous May.

The Burney graves in poor condition at Batheaston Phil Bendall

Henry Burney (b. and d. 1781)

Cecilia Charlotte Esther Burney (1789-1821) The enormous number of web links to *Cecilia,* the novel by her aunt, Frances Burney, has severely hampered the search for material about her. Dr Percy Scholes mistakenly has her named as two persons, Cecilia and Charlotte Esther, but her correct forenames are confirmed by her will.

In April 1821 Cecilia, another daughter of Charles Rousseau, "resigned her innocent life in so calm and tranquil a state, that her Mother, Mrs. Bourdois, and Mrs. Sandford, would have thought she had only fallen asleep, had not the affliction of Mrs. Sandford, who knew to the contrary, convinced them that it was otherwise. . . . She was deservedly beloved by her Relations and friends, as she possessed estimable and amiable qualities: to which were added great talents; particularly for music; this was discovered at an early age, as she began composing elegant little songs, in her 13th year. Those which she produced later in life, were masterly compositions, and her Pianoforte playing was executed with taste, neatness and expression. She had acquired a competent knowledge of the French and Italian languages, and possessed a genus for poetry. . . . She died at the age of 32."

She was a talented composer but very little else is known of this side of her life. She died at Mr Sandford's in Worcester in April 1821. This is clearly William Sandford (d. 1823), who was a surgeon at Worcester Infirmary and husband of Charles Rousseau Burney's sister, Rebecca. They then lived at Bridge Street, Worcester. Clearly Cecilia was accompanied by her mother and sister Hannah Maria to the Sandfords. It is most likely she was buried in one of the Worcester city churches.

Harriet Burney died young.

Amelia Maria Burney (1792-1868) lived at 20 Charles Street, Bath and died 27 September 1868 aged 76. She was buried in Bath Abbey Cemetery, where there is a monumental inscription.

Known compositions of Charles Rousseau Burney include *Two sonatas for the harpsichord or piano forte; and a duet for two performers on one instrument:* Op. II, dedicated to the Hon. Mrs North (London, 1786); *Four sonatas: for the harpsichord or piano-forte, with an accompaniment for a violin, and a duet, for two performers on one instrument,* (London, 1781) and *Air with variations for the piano forte* (Longman and Broderip, *c*. 1795).

Works of Cecilia Burney include a piano sonata *'Le séjour agréable',* Op. 2, dedicated to Mrs Garnier (G. Walkar [sic], 1810?) and *Lady Avondale's Song* dedicated Mrs Holroyd. It begins: "Oh! tell me have I lost", the words from the *Refusal* by Mrs. West (Chappell & Co., 1817).

Further information can be found in Joyce Hemlow, *A History of Fanny Burney,* (1958), Percy Scholes, *Great Doctor Burney*, (1948); R. Brimley Johnson, *Fanny Burney and the Burneys*, (1926)and Lorna Clark with Sarah Rose Smith, eds *The "Works" and "Novels, Plays and Poems" by Sophia Elizabeth Burney.*

Tony Woolrich

Corner of Charles and King Streets, Bath

Improvements in Cider-making

The Establishment of the National Fruit and Cider Institute in Somerset

'We've come up from Somerset, where the cider apples grow' goes the line in a Somerset folk song. Cider is closely associated with the county, with much of the landscape being suitable for growing apple trees. However, by the mid-nineteenth century the reputation of the county's cider was low, with rough farmhouse cider being a decidedly acquired taste, mostly drunk by farm labourers.

It was Robert Neville Grenville, the Squire of Butleigh, who first saw the possible importance of good quality cider to Somerset's rural economy. In 1893 he began experiments in on his estate, working with the chemist Frederick Lloyd, with funding provided by the Bath and West of England Society. At this time little was known about the apples that were used and the varieties proliferated. Chemical reactions during fermentation were poorly understood, and apples were mixed at will during cider making with very variable results. A laboratory was established at Neville Grenville's farm at Butleigh Court, and experiments continued over ten years, with the results reported by Lloyd to the Board of Agriculture in 1903.

One of their main wishes was to make a stable and consistent cider which could be bottled and sold. To do this they needed to understand the science of the yeasts and fermentation processes. Lloyd and other members of the National Association of Cidermakers could see that what was needed was a proper research station. This view was also shared by the Board of Agriculture, which established a Provisional Cider Committee to discuss the venture during 1902.

This led to the founding of the National Fruit and Cider Institute at Long Ashton in 1903. Somerset was a natural choice for the institute due to the work of Neville Grenville, the strong cider-making tradition in the county, and the offer of 15 acres of land by Lady Smyth of Ashton Court. It was funded jointly by the Board of Agriculture and six neighbouring County Councils (Somerset, Devon, Herefordshire, Monmouthshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire). However, not everyone was initially in favour and Hereford Town Council opposed its location, arguing that they were the centre of cider and perry-making in Britain and the new centre needed to be in Hereford. The Institute also had to battle with the conservatism of some Somerset farmers who thought that they didn't need to be taught how to make cider. To get round this a good early piece of PR was the introduction of an annual cider tasting event in 1906. Needless to state this was one initiative with which the farmers were only too happy to co-operate!

The Institute's aims were to investigate and demonstrate the best methods of fruit cultivation and manufacture of cider and perry; to improve current varieties of fruit and introduce new varieties; to provide education about fruit and cider-making and to promote the interests of farmers and fruit growers. Frederick Lloyd was appointed as its first Director. In 1904 the Brewers' Exhibition and the Mid-Somerset Agricultural Society gave the Institute the collections of cider fruit that had been shown at their exhibitions. This gave a basis from which to start research into classifying cider apples to ascertain varieties of cider, and whether the apples required blending or could be used alone.

Neville Grenville's cider team

The National Fruit and Cider Institute shortly after it was opened

Over the next few years work was done to classify the huge variety of cider apple, and experiments were carried out to try and create a more uniform beverage. This included recording average weight, juice percentages, specific gravity of juice, and presence of solids, malic acid, sugars, tannin and extractives, differentiated by growers and districts. Characteristic flavours of different varieties were tested, as well as detailed biological experiments into organisms present during fermentation and maturation of cider. The experiments proved that the most important factor in cider production was the type of apples. Other influences were secondary, including kinds of ferments present and methods of manufacture. They found that some apple varieties gave similar yields regardless of where they were grown, and few varieties were suited to cider making without blending.

Experiments were undertaken to test cider-making equipment, and recommendations were made about the best brands. Tests were carried out into cider adulteration, following the government's agenda to improve the quality of foodstuffs. Cider makers were also encouraged to bring technical difficulties and problems with diseased trees to the Institute so that relevant research could be carried out. Practical demonstrations of techniques were given at agricultural shows, such as the Bath and West.

In 1912 the Institute became part of the University of Bristol and changed its name to the Long Ashton Research Station. It flourished throughout the 20th century, perhaps being best known for its development of the Ribena blackcurrant drink. After a century of research it finally closed in 2003, having played an important role in the development of British cider.

Janet Tall

Plant pathologists studying apples at the former research station

Former Hirst laboratory, Long Ashton

Some Somerset Factories

Large scale factory buildings begin with textiles, in Somerset as elsewhere. The origins of Gant's Mill, Bruton, are a stocking mill of the 1740s, doubled in size as a silk mill *c*. 1812. The big Union Chapel (now 'At the Chapel') on Bruton High Street was converted in 1836 from a late 18th-century silk mill. The earliest buildings on Thomas Fox's site at Tonedale, Wellington, date from 1801-3. The site has the most spectacular mill building in the county, the huge five-storey mill of 1861-71 lower down on the same site.

Gants Mill, Bruton, addition of c. *1812*

Tonedale, Wellington, 1801-3 range

Tonedale, Wellington, 1861-71 block

Boden Mill, Chard

Detail of roof at Boden Mill, Chard

There are early wool and silk mills at Frome, and two towering lace mills at Chard, Boden Mill of 1825, and Holyrood Mill of 1828-30, both with cast-iron roof trusses. There were crepe-de-chine mills on the Kilver site at Shepton Mallet, and on Chapel Street in Dulverton.

The mills at Dowlish Ford near Ilminster illustrate the changing nature of textile mills: built for silk in the early 19th century, converted to spinning flax and hemp in the 1840s and then extended to make twine for carpets. The flax and sailcloth industry of the Crewkerne to West Coker area did not leave many large factory buildings, among the largest, Viney Bridge Mill at Crewkerne, originating in 1789, and Richard Hayward's Tail Mill at Merriott of the early 19th century.

Dowlish Ford mills

Webbing was a speciality of the Crewkerne area. Crewkerne also had a shirt factory on Abbey Street and Taunton had several shirt and collar factories. These are late 19th century as are the glove factory buildings that survive in Yeovil and elsewhere. The intriguing Parrett Works of 1855 outside Martock combined agricultural engineering with a flax-mill. The most unusual of the textile industries was at Castle Cary where a factory was built for making horsehair fabric in 1851, an industry that continues in the town.

Bonsoir shirt factory, Abbey St, Crewkerne

Boyd's horsehair factory, Castle Cary, 1851

Station Way glove factory, Yeovil

Parrett Works, Martock, 1855

Morlands, Glastonbury, 1934

Heavy manufacturing is represented by the Newark Works, Lower Bristol Road, Bath, 1857, for Stothert & Pitt, crane-makers, and by the Nautilus Works of 1902 at Yeovil, of J.B. Petter who made oil engines, and motor-cars, but has gone from the county except for the Agusta-Westland Helicopter works at Yeovil, originating in 1915.

The Baily & Co. factory by the Morland site at Glastonbury was built for tanning in 1867 with a front building for a glove factory added in 1890-6. The Morland site contains the most distinctive of 20th-century buildings, the so-called Zig-Zag Building of 1934, by Harold Alves of Glastonbury, utterly modern in its wide floors and wrap-around glazing. Morlands made sheepskin products here on a site that included tanneries.

Leather was the basis of the Clark shoe business at Street, and their three-storey factory embellished with a clock-tower at the front in 1887. Here too a modern note was struck with the More Light Building of 1933 by Jack Stock. The name came from Goethe's dying words, chosen by Bancroft Clark. He was also the promoter of the equally modernist open-air swimming pool of 1936-7 heated from the factory steam-engine.

Clarks, Street, 1933 block

Frome Tool & Gauge factory, 1964-5

The later 20th-century and early 21st has been the era of warehousing rather than manufacturing, the Morrison Distribution Centre near Bridgwater is the largest example.

Among the best 20th-century factory buildings are the Frome Tool & Gauge factory of 1964-5 by Michael Hitchings, with its concrete shell roofs, the Bath Cabinetmakers at Twerton, Bath, 1966-7 by YRM, and the sleek Herman Miller factory across the river at Locksbrook, Bath, 1976, by Farrell Grimshaw, clad in glass-reinforced plastic.

None of these three is still in industrial use.

Bath Cabinetmakers, Twerton, 1966-7

Herman Miller factory, Locksbrook, Bath, 1976

Julian Orbach

Images by Julian Orbach

Attitudes to Industry

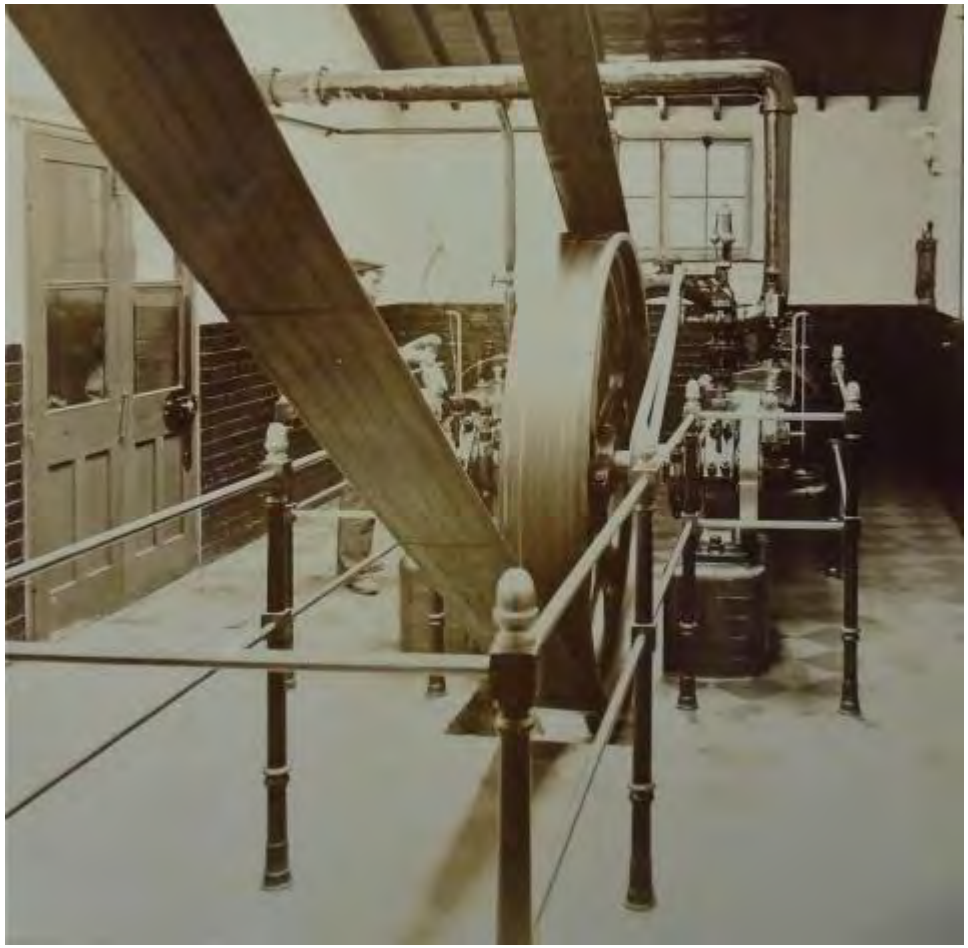
It may seem hard now to imagine Taunton bristling with smoking factory chimneys but that was the scene from the early 19th until the mid 20th century. The four and five storey silk mills at South and Tancred streets and Pool Wall and their chimneys up to 80ft high marked a revolutionary change in the appearance of Taunton. Today blocks of flats dominate the skyline, only two truncated factory chimneys remain and most of the old mills and factories have gone.

Factory chimney used as a communication mast at Princes St, Taunton.
The scar marks the site of a bridge to the main Viney Street factory.

Mary Siraut

A wide range of industrial trades were found in Taunton although textiles and clothing were always dominant. In 1683 most of 3,000 men in the town were said to be combers and weavers. In 1821 of 1,706 families 1,281 were engaged in trade, manufacture or craft.

Some industries were created by gifted designers and inventers like cabinet maker John Steevens, engineer Walter Easton, electrician Francis Murray Newton and car maker James Beech. Early factories have not survived but silk mills were generally clean and heated and provided cooking facilities for workers. Later shirt and collar factories also provided sanitary and refreshment facilities for their mainly female workforce. In the years before 1914 many factories were rebuilt with more attention paid to light and ventilation and regular inspection. The food industry had also been increasingly mechanised amid greater concern for hygiene.



Steam engine at Pool Wall Mills, Upper High St, Taunton SWHT

By the late 1920s there was a great deal of unemployment and in late 1932 there were over 1,400 registered unemployed, mainly men, compared with fewer than 400 in 1931. Only 175 women, presumably single, registered as unemployed and the large numbers of unskilled boys no longer needed to run errands and deliver goods were not qualified to register. It was estimated that those actually out of work numbered over 2,000. Faced with the cost of providing work and housing the borough council was urged to encourage new industrial development especially manufacturing jobs for unskilled men. Many councillors were against new factories, wanting Taunton to be a residential and educational town only, considering factories to be unsightly and unwanted and that unemployed workers should move away to find work.

Alderman Van Trump, a factory owner, tried to speak up for industry but most councillors were drawn from the ranks of professional men and high -class tradesmen who could afford to take time away from their business and had skilled staff to look after their interests. Their customers were middle-class and they could see no benefit from having a working-class industrial population.

Similarly the borough magistracy had always been a bulwark of old Taunton Anglican families, but in 1915 a nonconformist factory manager was recommended as understanding the working class and in 1917 it was agreed that it was time working men were appointed. On the council too some attitudes were changing. William Brake elected Mayor in November 1933, cited the argument about a residential town and asked how anyone could object to Taunton's factories. 'Without them I hesitate to think what would be the position of our traders.' He also approved of the employment provided for women and girls as essential wage earners in their families.

Although many pushed an image of Taunton as the quiet market town, in 1934 there were still 19 factories employing more than 50 people, only three fewer than in 'industrial' Bridgwater. However, prejudice continued even against clean industries. In 1939 Muirhead and Co., telegraph and

Mr van Trump with carnival float outside his collar works in St Augustine St, early 20th century *SWHT*

electrical engineers engaged in admiralty contracts, proposed an engineering factory at Stonegallows Hill on the corner of Bishops Hull Road. Local residents opposed the factory as reducing their house values. Ninety one signed a petition, permission was refused and the company went elsewhere. The Amalgamated Engineering union objected to the refusal as did the architects H W Stone and partners, saying £1,500 a week had been lost to Taunton.

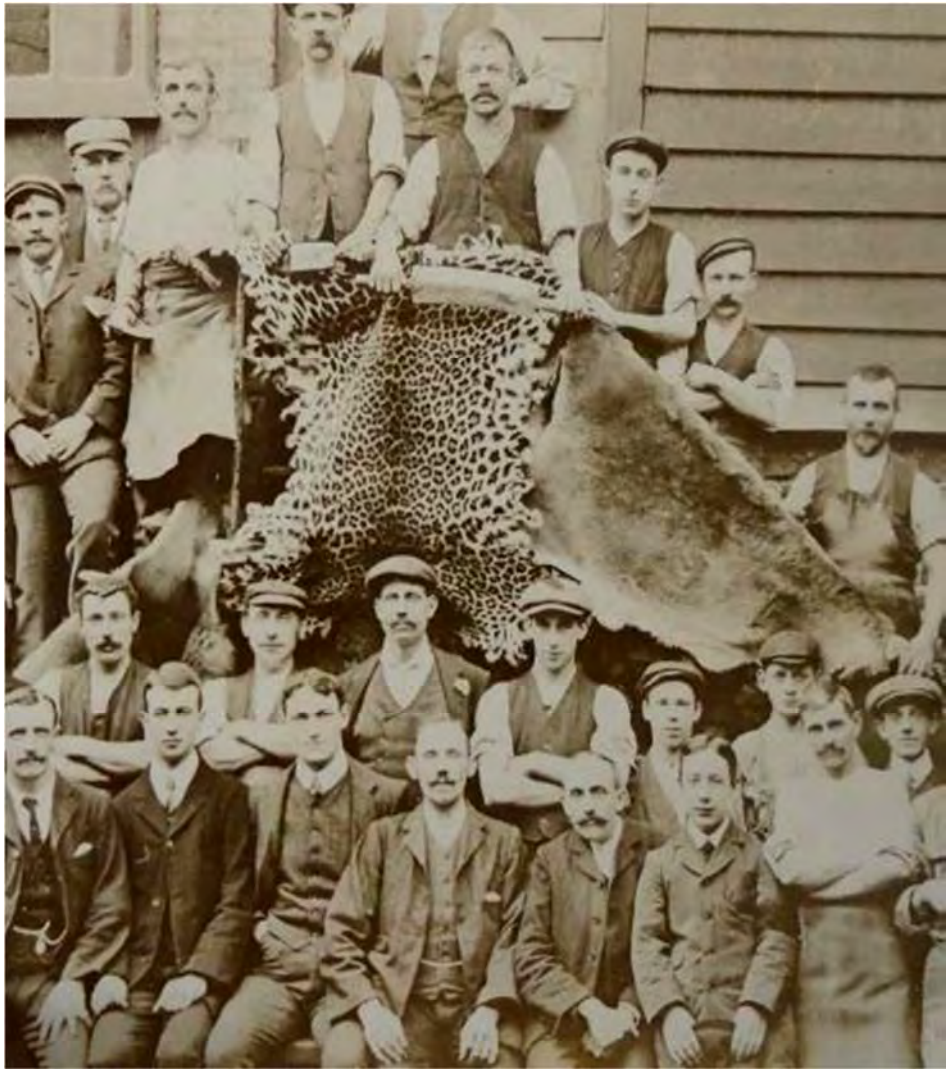
The attitude also conflicted with the stated aim of the council a year earlier that industry added to the commercial stability of the town and should be encouraged. One councillor feared that they were creating the impression factories were not wanted in the area.

Why was there antipathy to industry? Concern about pollution occurs from the Middle Ages onwards. By the post-medieval period Taunton's cloth industry was on an industrial scale but until the advent of the silk mills it was not powered. Production of woollen cloth, especially serge, could only be speeded up by oiling the wool for faster handling. Wool breakers broke or scribbled the fleeces removing dirt and adding fat, which in the West Country was usually train oil made from pilchards. The process produced a terrible stench and meant that later cleaning with strong industrial soap was needed. The oily polluted water ended up in the river and sometimes in drinking water.

Tanning has always been an anti-social industry, usually sited downwind of towns. The finished leather may be inoffensive but raw hides are a different matter. Skins were brought to market by butchers who were fined if they sold them elsewhere. Where they were placed for sale was clearly important and in Taunton in the early 17th century some had been laid in front of house doors. In 1852 the Tancred Street tanyard in Taunton had a pit of offensive matter so bad that when it was emptied into the stream the inhabitants could scarcely remain in their homes. The company was ordered to clean and fill in the pit. The Bristol and Western Counties Butchers Hide, Skin, Fat and Wool Company occupied the old Tangier Brewery site from *c*. 1918 until 1978. They used the site to store raw skins in salt, which not unnaturally upset nearby residents. In 1919 evidence was given of the stench of putrid skins, the filthy state of the premises and the salted liquid running into the soil.

Slaughtering, tripe, soap and glue boiling and tallow candle and manure making were also offensive trades, which polluted water and streets and created terrible smells, of which the residents of Taunton complained regularly down the centuries. The slaughtering of horses in Great Magdalene Lane in the 16th century was offensive to those going to church and in 1865 the slaughterhouse by the police station at Shuttern was a nuisance and was said to be much larger than when it had gained permission in 1858. It was still there in the 1950s although the police had moved across the road. In 1855 Mrs Trood and her son had a glue and manure works in Bridge Street. They were persuaded to move to Firepool.

It was rare for the many foundries, brickyards, potteries, silk mills, furniture factories, or coach and motor car works to get complaints. It seems that objections to industry often came from fear of being overwhelmed by large numbers of workers, especially migrants from the surrounding area, who would become a burden to the parish when laid off.



Early 20th-century workers at French's tannery, Tancred Street, Taunton with tools and exotic skins *SWHT*

Collar making at Van Heusen, Taunton after the Second World War SWHT

From the 19th century there were fears of crime and disorder, worries about the better off leaving and reducing rateable income, concern over the provision of housing and sanitation, and Taunton's chronic shortage of water. The stated desire of the council in the early 20th century that Taunton should be an educational and residential centre reflects an era when many better-off families still lived on private means rather than earnings. There was the usual concern that girls preferred factory work to domestic service and servants were is short supply raising their wages. There was also a growing class of owner occupiers concerned with the value of their homes.

Those attitudes were never universal and there was often a pride in the achievements of Taunton's industries. John Steevens and his son Alfred were keen exhibitors of their furniture including the Taunton cabinet at the Great Exhibition of 1851 and the Taunton sideboard at the International Exhibition in 1862. Pearsalls showed embroidery silks in 'unfading eastern dyes' at several exhibitions in the 19th century. Newtons took their latest electrical machinery to the British Empire Exhibition in 1924.

After the Second World War it was considered desirable to have cleaner industries. Thomas Sharp's controversial 1948 plan for Taunton expressed anxiety over industrial Taunton and wanted a future dependent on services. However, in August 1949 an industries fair was held in Vivary Park as part of Taunton Holiday week. It was said that Taunton's 'industrio-social structure' and diversity safeguarded against unemployment and depression and provided work for all regardless of age, sex or skill. A large number of local employers were represented including Spiller and Webber, Somerset Refrigeration, Kennedys, the Somerset Manufacturing Company, Van Heusen, Pearsalls, Minimax and French's tannery.

By 1955 although the county council was still against more industry in Taunton the borough was in favour. New factories were built along the south side of Priorswood Road and at Cornishway in Bishops Hull.

By 1961 only 22% of workers were engaged in manufacturing and the largest industry was shirt and collar making employing c. 1,700 people. Workers were mainly women who worked in six factories, a fall from 1,850 ten years earlier. Large numbers were still employed in food processing, engineering and silk and smaller numbers in boatbuilding, basketmaking and leather. Already nearly 70% of workers were in the administrative and service sectors.

Former collar works St Augustine Street, Taunton *Mary Siraut*

In 1964 the town was considered too dependent on marketing and shopping. It was estimated that over 5,000 new manufacturing jobs would be needed in the following decade, especially for men, and there were hopes that the shirt and collar industry would expand, also silk, printing and publishing, engineering and cabinet making.

However, by 1978 manufacturing had fallen to less than 19% largely with the decline in textile and clothing employment to under 1,000, but over 1,000 people were employed in each of the printing and engineering sectors. By the end of the century most of those jobs would have gone with the closure of the last collar and shirt factories, most food processing, engineering, and newspaper and book printing works. There are a handful of modern factories, mostly on the outskirts of the town.

The best survivors of industrial Taunton are clothing factories including the Van Trump collar works in St Augustine Street of the 1890s, the West of England Clothing Company's coat factory at Victoria Gate of *c*. 1900, the Steel and Glover shirt factory of 1956-7, (now Hi Point, in Railway Street) and the 1961 former Van Heusen shirt and collar works in Viney Street.

Mary Siraut

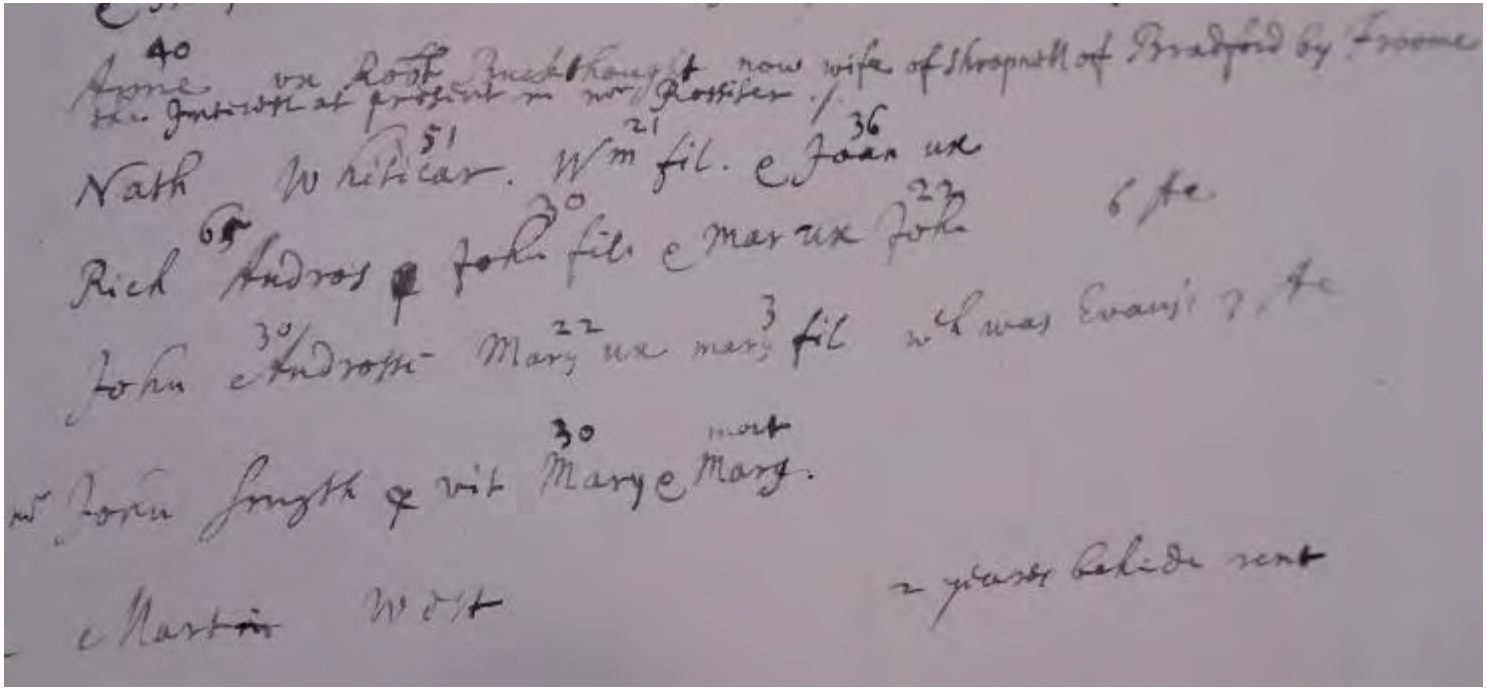
Former coat factory Victoria Gate, Taunton *Mary Siraut*

Snippets from VCH Research: some families in 1686

Sometimes a scrappy note in a collection of documents can prove more interesting than the formal records.

The Portman family's Taunton property was only a small part of their overall estate but the Interregnum had cost them dear, £5,000 to Taunton borough alone, and every bit of income was wanted.

On 16 April 1686 a note was written out concerning the Taunton tenants for lives, their ages, arrears of rent and personal circumstances. We learn a great deal about these very ordinary people.



Some could not pay their rent or had died, like Gabriel West who had been living in Lyme. Mary Browne had four daughters aged 19 to 23 but had nothing to live on and said her landlord might take her goods. Another woman whose brother had died was forgiven over £2 arrears of rent.

Men at this period often married much later than women so that there could be a large age gap between spouses. Widowhood and remarriage was common, as were parents who outlived even their adult children. When Joan Reynolds died her husband married another Joan, a widow with two children. After merchant Thomas Patten's wife died leaving him with several small children he married a young widow Mary Hurley whose first husband had died less than ten years after their marriage leaving her with an infant daughter. It proved a good match as Mary's brother died childless and she inherited his estate. She and Thomas had a son, Joseph, but no provision was made for her daughter.

Nor were people the stay at homes that we might imagine. When Anstice Buckthought's husband died she married an ironmonger from Bradford on Avon. Penelope Tut moved to Creech with her son after her husband died. Anthony Bud had lost his eldest son, but 32-year old Benjamin was keeping house at Chatham and 21-year old David was a surgeon living at Temple Bar.

Historic Images of Somerset

The first place to harness the power of Exmoor's rivers to generate electricity was Lynmouth in 1890 using a weir on the East Lyn and a 'Little Giant' Lincolnshire turbine ,but its output was very limited. Porlock tried using a traditional watermill in 1909. The most successful hydro-electric scheme, however, was at Dulverton.

Hydro-electric plant near Dulverton *SWHT*

The Dulverton Electric Lighting Company was incorporated in 1904 under Richard Barrow who tried a waterwheel and then an oil engine before building a hydro-electric plant on the river Barle below Battleton. A concrete weir was built and two Armfield river turbines were housed in a corrugated iron building on the west side of the river. The turbines were later replaced by two vertically shafted turbines producing 50 kW each. In 1930 the company merged with the Exe Valley Electric Company.

The plant, known as the Beasley Power Station after the neighbouring farm, continued to generate electricity for lighting until 1938 when the national grid arrived at Dulverton. However, it was maintained throughout the Second World War as an emergency standby. In the 1950s the plant was dismantled ,but demolition was never completed and the weir and corrugated iron building survived.

After being used as a fish weir and abandoned again in the 1980s it became the subject of new hydro-electric schemes. Plans were drawn up in the early 21st century for a new hydro-electric generating plant to be constructed on the site capable of powering *c*. 85 houses.

The new power station uses an Archimedes screw turbine and started generating in 2015.

Forthcoming Events

CLEEVE ABBEY

A visit led by archaeologist
James Bond

Saturday 25 June 2022

Meet at 2pm at English Heritage car park, west side of Abbey Road, Washford, well signed from A 39, bus stop and station.

Places limited. To book please email vch@swheritage.org.uk or ring 01823.347456 [voicemail]. Walking is fairly level and gentle and the whole visit will last no more than two hours.

Suggested donations of £5 to the Somerset County History Trust. Admission to the abbey extra for non-members of English Heritage.

English Heritage require advance information about visiting parties. When booking please could you say if you are an English Heritage member or if you are a paying adult or concession and whether you are coming by car. Thank you.

Notices of all events will be sent to subscribers to this newsletter.

Former Van Heusen collar and shirt factory, Taunton Victoria Street frontage.

Mary Siraut

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