

Welcome from the Editor

Welcome to our tenth newsletter, keeping you in touch with the work of the County History Trust. After the excitement of the popular and well-received Cheltenham Short, it might be thought that the Trust would be taking a breather, but far from it! The following pages show that it and its contracted historians and volunteers are working as hard as ever to build upon the fine work which has already been achieved. Our two 'shorts' provide the evidence that we are achieving our aims of completing the Victoria

County History volumes for the historic county of Gloucestershire. However, this cannot be achieved without continual efforts to raise funds. We are very grateful for the financial support which many of you have given or continue to give. Can you join them, no matter how small or large the donation, which can be increased for tax payers through Gift Aid? Please contact our treasurer if you would like to find out more. In the meantime, please put Monday 25 February 6pm in your diary. James Hodsdon explains its importance below.

The Trust was well-represented at the opening of the Heritage Hub by the Princess Royal on 8 January. Heather Forbes' report describes the afternoon later in the newsletter. The occasion provided a good opportunity to add the Trust's own



The Princess Royal chats to our chair, James Hodsdon and our County Co-ordinator, Jan Broadway, at the opening of the Heritage Hub (Gloucestershire Archives)

VCH Gloucestershire

Newsletter 10 January 2019

archive, dating back to its founding in 2010, to the existing VCH archive held at the Hub, with open access for visitors who might wish to consult it.

Once again, my thanks go to Jonathan Comber for collecting the various contributions, to John Chandler for the excellent production and to all the contributors. We hope you find our tenth newsletter interesting and informative. If you have any comments or further ideas, please let me know: dhaldred@btinternet.com.

David Aldred
Editor

Report from the Trust

It's good to report that the first printing of our latest Short, *Cheltenham before the Spa*, has completely sold out. We've ordered a few more copies for local needs but will rely on online means for most future sales, as this is much less of a burden on volunteers. Most of us would rather be researching than handling cheques and putting books in jiffy bags (nevertheless a big thank you to all those who did so)! Initial independent reviews have been very positive, commenting favourably on the interpretative topic panels as well as the detailed content. You can read one of these at:

<http://www.bgas.org.uk/publications/reviews/craven.pdf>

We are keeping a note of feedback from readers about errors and suggestions – so far, there have been very few reports of the former, and of course they can be corrected when the hardback Red Book appears. My personal hope is that we'll have more and better maps in the larger hardback format – maps can do so much to set historical facts in context. Just dwelling on the future Cheltenham volume for a moment, as well as Jan Broadway working on 20th century themes for the town, we also have the prospect of John Chandler getting going soon on Swindon village – more on these below.

As we enter the New Year, our focus is on re-invigorating our fund-raising, which in some ways is the Trust's raison d'être. Contractual commitments to our existing editors account for most of the money we have in the bank, so if we are to keep up the desired pace in our three project areas (Cirencester, Cheltenham and South Gloucestershire), some serious new support is

needed. In the last six months, besides the regular income from standing orders from many readers of this newsletter, we've had a useful cheque from St James's Place in Cirencester (towards Volume 16), and news of a comparable grant from the Charles Irving Charitable Trust in Cheltenham. This is all welcome, but we need much more. Aiming to attract new support and new supporters, we* have set up an event at the Cheltenham Town Hall on Monday 25 February (6 pm). Details are on the Town Hall website, at:

<http://www.cheltenhamtownhall.org.uk/event/writing-new-histories-of-cheltenham-cirencester-265156/>

The format will be short talks from John Chandler and Katy Layton-Jones, bookended by some gentle persuasion from me and others about the need to dig deep.

*The 'we' is a joint effort with the Honourable Company of Gloucestershire, who (you may recall) have made grants to the Trust in the past, and who on this occasion have helped in kind by getting a special deal with the Town Hall, meaning that tickets are just £10 each, or £15 for a double, to include some refreshment on arrival. (Note that the ticket price simply covers the administrative costs of the event.) So if you'd like to help the cause even more, do PLEASE come, ESPECIALLY if you can bring a friend who isn't yet a supporter. And if you know of any other persons of goodwill who ought to be invited, do drop me a line. Although the event is in Cheltenham, we'll be making it clear that our projects go a lot wider.

James Hodsdon
Chairman

Opening of the Heritage Hub 8 January 2019

The Trust is proud to be one of the partners of the Hub. Heather Forbes is head of the archives' service at Gloucestershire County Council and South Gloucestershire Council and also a trustee of GCHT. Here is her report of the opening:

The Princess Royal was welcomed by Edward Gillespie OBE, Lord-Lieutenant for Gloucestershire to the newly-refurbished building in Alvin Street, Gloucester. During her visit, the Princess was introduced to the High Sheriff of Gloucestershire Charles Martell, the Mayor of Gloucester Cllr Joanne Brown, the Chairman of Gloucestershire County Council Cllr Andrew Gravells, Deputy Lord-Lieutenant Mark Hurrell and County Archivist Heather Forbes.

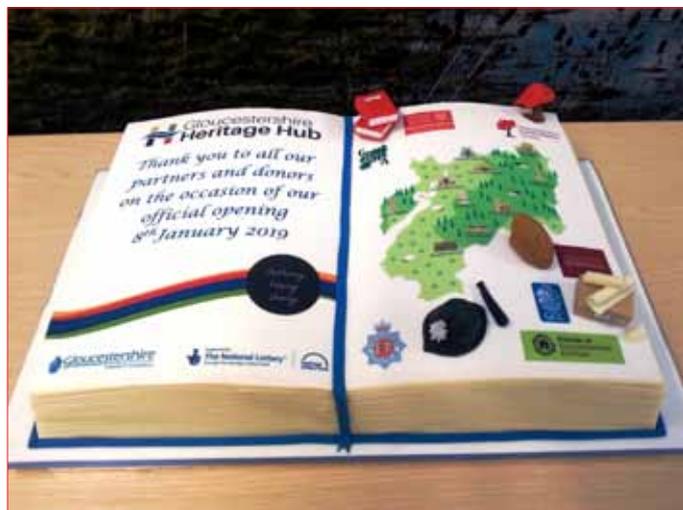
From our County Co-ordinator

The Princess received a tour of the Heritage Hub building and spoke to staff and volunteers from Gloucestershire Archives, Gloucestershire Family History Society, Gloucestershire Police History Project, Gloucestershire Local History Association, Gloucestershire County History Trust, Gloucester Rugby Heritage Group, the Friends of the Archives group, as well as project funders. She also had the opportunity to view displays of historic documents relating to her home, Gatcombe Park, and a selection of royal charters. The princess concluded her visit by unveiling a commemorative plaque.

Cllr Ray Theodoulou, cabinet member responsible for Gloucestershire Archives, said, "We are very proud to welcome Her Royal Highness to our Heritage Hub facility. The building has already welcomed visitors from all walks of life in the local community; from local school children to dementia groups looking to learn about how we gather, keep and share history. I would once again like to thank staff and volunteers for making this project come to fruition."

Heather also added: Gloucestershire County Council and our partners were delighted to welcome Her Royal Highness to commend the volunteering, community and partnership projects now possible in our new facilities. I hope everyone thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon celebrating what has been achieved so far and looking forward to a very positive future for our archives service.

(Within the Heritage Hub, the Trust has the use of a room, the Elrington Room, named after Christopher Elrington, who served as our county editor from 1961-68 and then general editor of the VCH in London from 1977-94. Ed.)

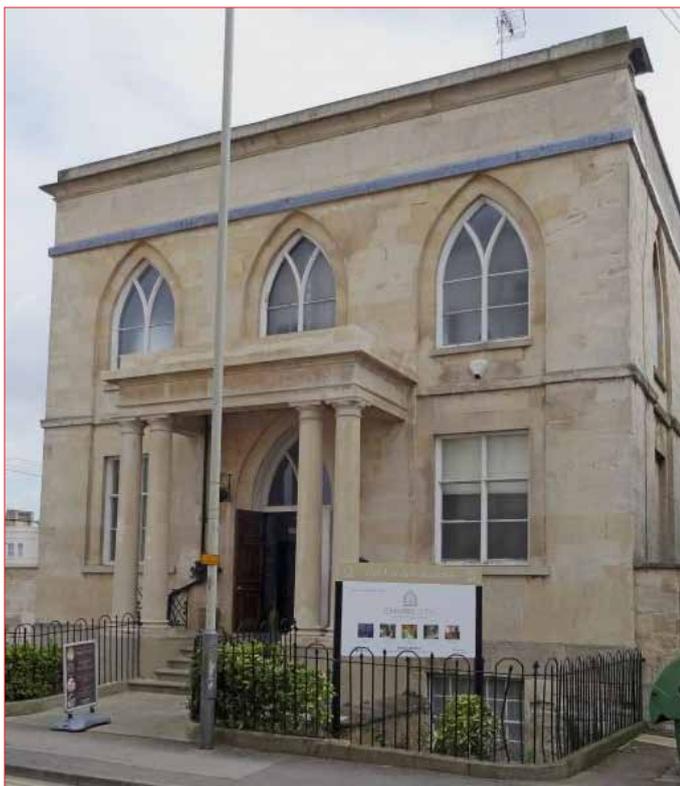


The celebratory Heritage Hub cake complete with mini Big Red Books

Recently I have been researching the religious history of Cheltenham. I must confess I had always thought of Gloucester as having a richer non-conformist heritage than its neighbour. So it came as a surprise to realise that by the mid-nineteenth century there were almost as many seats in Cheltenham's non-conformist chapels as in its Anglican churches. Foolish really, when I consider that I go to auctions in two converted chapels and have eaten or had a drink in others. One chapel I haven't yet entered is the Portland Chapel in North Place, although there is slightly more chance that I will cross the threshold now it's a spa rather than a gym!

The Portland Chapel was built at the expense of Robert Capper of Marle Hill, Esq. and opened in 1816. At his invitation Thomas Snow, a Wiltshire vicar who had seceded from the Church of England over the issue of infant baptism, became the first minister. They fell out, over Snow's strict policy of excluding those who had been baptised as infants from communion. Snow's supporters built a new chapel for him in Grosvenor Street (now ironically housing a County Council Youth Services condom distribution centre), while the Portland Chapel was occupied by the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion until 1976.

Robert Capper was described by Goding as 'proverbial for his benevolence', although he did not always display that benevolence when sitting as a magistrate. In May 1842 the freethinker George Jacob Holyoake lectured on Owenite Socialism at Cheltenham's Mechanics' Institute. After the lecture he was asked about his personal views by two people who he described as 'a pigeon fancier and a Methodist preacher' sent by the *Cheltenham Chronicle*, presumably in the hope of generating some interesting copy. His flippant response to a question about the place of religion in the proposed socialist communities led to him being hauled before the magistrates, probably at the instigation of the Rev. Francis Close. According to Holyoake the bench headed by Capper treated him 'with both cruelty and petty indignity'. Holyoake was sentenced to 6 months in Gloucester gaol for blasphemy, which even the then Home Secretary Sir James Graham described as having been unnecessarily harsh. The severity of the sentence may be partly explained by the general unrest of 1842, labelled by some



Portland chapel today (Jan Broadway)

more excitable elements of the press as the Chartist Insurrection, although with Holyoake speaking in his own defence for nine hours even the most benevolent of magistrates might have found their sympathy ebbing away.

The Chartists and Cheltenham's politically radical past are topics for another day...

Jan Broadway
Co-ordinator, VCH Gloucestershire

Updates from our Contracted Editors

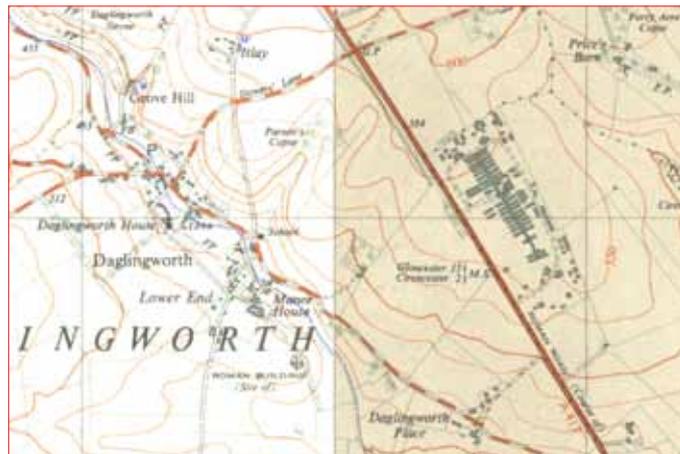
Cirencester and surrounding parishes

Daglingworth Polish Camp and the prison that never was

As occurred across Great Britain during the Second World War, the environs of Cirencester played host to a large number of American servicemen as they mustered, trained and took leave from the conflict. On one site near the village of Daglingworth, close to the boundary with Baunton, a substantial army

base was constructed to house American army personnel. The site comprised row upon row of nissen huts with their distinctive arched roofs of corrugated iron, providing only the most basic amenities for their temporary residents. Although it was originally intended that the site should be demolished once its military purpose was redundant, it was in fact to have a much longer and more diverse life.

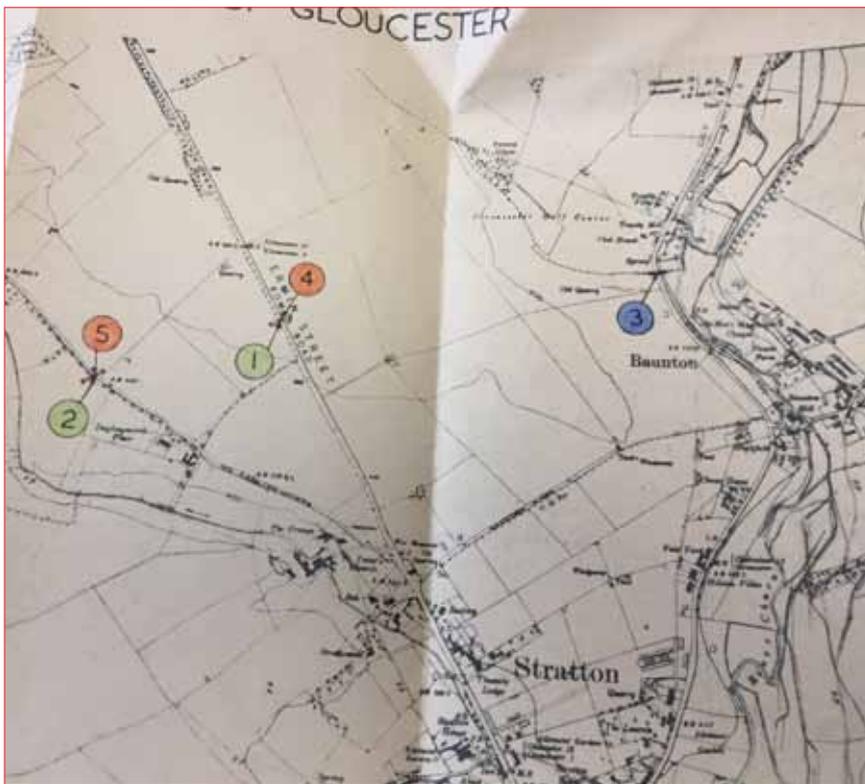
After VE-Day the site continued to be utilised by the American military until, in 1947, the British government's Ministry of Works purchased the facility and converted it into a Polish transit camp. The camp was to house Poles who had travelled from mainland Europe and Africa to be reunited with Polish service personnel already resident in the UK. For many, Daglingworth was to be their first peacetime home for over eight years. While it was never the intention that the site should become a family camp, in reality hundreds of families were housed there for as long as fifteen years. In 1948 the camp established its own primary school, 'Daglingworth Polish Primary School'.



The Daglingworth camp (OS sheets SO90, SP00. Published 1959 on partial revisions 1938-56. Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland)

In the early years, the primitive huts were occupied with little modification. The residential huts had no running water and occupants shared communal washing facilities, but it was planned as a temporary venture. However, as with so many ostensibly 'short-term' post-war projects, the reality proved different. By 1955 it was realised that the camp was likely to remain active for a substantial period of time, prompting the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation to use the Requisitioned Land and War Works Acts of 1945 and 1948 to formalise the electricity cables and water pipes serving the site.

Such improvements may have been welcome, but they did not resolve the underlying challenge



*'Order. Retention of electricity cables, water main and sewer pipes under highways at Daglingworth and Baunton' (1955)
(GA. C/CH/Or/1/10/18)*

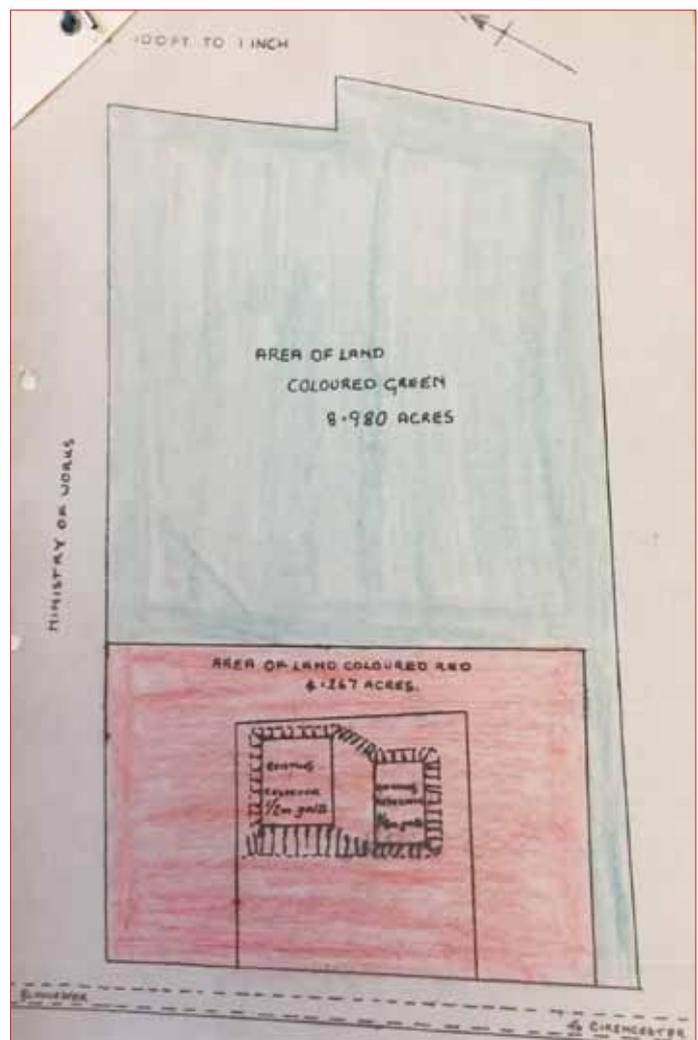
of rehousing the residents. In December 1959, the *Daily Telegraph* drew public attention to what it perceived to be a national disgrace that '3000 Poles still live in camps after 12 years'. The residents of the Daglingworth camp were among them. The camp finally closed three years later in 1962. At this point it was again intended that the land should be returned to its former agricultural purpose. However, there remained one final twist and, as it transpired, controversy in the camp's story.

In 1960, the National Assistance Board had written to Cirencester Urban District Council (CUDC) enquiring whether they might be willing to develop the site with social housing to provide more appropriate long-term accommodation for the Polish families who had effectively settled in the area. The Council was willing to explore the idea and began to look into the applicable costs and subsidies. However, the County Council rejected the scheme. In the autumn of 1961, CUDC received a communication from Her Majesty's Prison Commission, expressing the intention of that governmental body to acquire the site east of the reservoir, including the Polish camp, and convert it into a detention centre for 'up to 75 boys' aged between 14 and 18, who 'the Courts feel would benefit from the short, sharp shock treatment'.

The detention centre would require the demolition of the existing huts and erection of a new

building with a large number of houses for staff. Unsurprisingly, the Council was not sympathetic to the prison proposal and nor were their legal advisors. In one letter from J.N. Wharton Esq. of Messers. Ryland, Martineau & Co. to the local Cirencester legal firm, Messers. Mullings, Ellet and Co., Wharton exclaimed 'I hope you are ready to lambaste the Prison Commissioners'. In light of such opposition, it was eventually resolved to hold a public inquiry. The inquiry opened on 1 November 1962.

Submissions to the inquiry were impassioned and, on the part of local residents and CUDC, almost unanimously hostile. The war remained fresh in the nation's mind and CUDC's representative drew powerful comparisons to installations



*Site of the proposed detention centre (1961)
(GA. DA4/140/87)*

in authoritarian regimes. He argued that the prison was to be 'surrounded, like any other concentration camp by a fence of metal bars 12 feet high...I had the advantage and benefit of examining just such a fence from 1940-1945. I can personally affirm that its appearance is more in keeping with Nazi Germany and the Iron Curtain than with our mellow Cotswold Hills.'

As the landscape today testifies, the proposal was ultimately refused and, in 1962, the entire site was cleared. However, the story of the camp's origin and habitation, and the battle over its future, chart the rapidly changing political and social priorities of village communities, local government and national agencies during, and in the wake of, the Second World War.

Katy Layton-Jones

Cirencester Abbey

Not all the remaining records of the medieval abbey at Cirencester have been published. Amongst the unpublished documents are a series of obedientiary accounts. An obedientiary was a lesser official of a monastery. The obedientiaries at Cirencester included the keeper of the church of Cheltenham, for example.

These records, which date from the thirteenth century, are in private ownership but housed at Staffordshire Record Office under the reference Aqualate Collection: D(W)1788/P54/B8. I used these records when researching the history of the abbey for Volume 16, and also the history of the church of Cheltenham for Volume 15. I am glad to say that permission has been granted for these unique records to be edited for publication. The intention is that they should be published by the Gloucestershire Record Series. Year on year the detail contained in the accounts is somewhat repetitive, but there are also the odd snippets which illuminate topics of more general interest than the detailed finances of the abbey. Here are a few examples:

From the year 1263-4

'Memorandum that this year there was war in England, wherefore no wool fleeces were sold this side of the Thames ... on account of the war.'

(This is a reference to the civil war between Simon de Montfort and his followers and King Henry III and his supporters in the mid 1260s, and

demonstrates the extent to which the kingdom was disturbed by this conflict.)

'For a book written for the Queen...'

(Entries such as this demonstrate how the abbey sought to steer its way through the difficult political waters of the period.)

From the year 1269-70

'For a new kitchen, ...for the building of houses in Cirencester and outside the manor... for a new kitchen... for lands bought.'

(References such as these demonstrate the expanding landed interests of the abbey.)

'Memorandum that treasurers must account before the abbot and prior, as well as other brothers for moneys deposited in the treasury...'

(This reminds us that the officers of the monastery were subject to financial regulations.)

Beth Hartland

Yate and the Sodburies

Chipping Sodbury

Over the last few months, the draft histories of the three Sodbury parishes have been taking shape, and we are very close to having all three parishes completed. There are now more than 70,000 words drafted on the three histories, which includes substantial contributions from Beth Hartland on the medieval period, and Phil Baker's histories of the schools in Little Sodbury and Old Sodbury. Unsurprisingly, approximately half of this total relates to the town of Chipping Sodbury. Fundamentally its role over the last eight centuries has changed little. Once it was a provincial market town lying on a major thoroughfare, providing accommodation and refreshment to the numerous travellers that passed along its high street, and exploiting its position on the edge of the Cotswolds to profit from the cloth trade. The modern-day town remains principally a market-place for the supply of goods and services to a wider locality, although now it is marketed as a destination in its own right for customers of a certain social cachet. The traditional craftsmen – the tanners and cordwainers, the saddlers and the weavers – have given way in the historic core of the town to boutiques



and delicatessens, coffee shops and hairdressers, although the pubs remain important still. On the edge of the town, there is further evidence of the old being supplanted by the new with the new Waitrose supermarket, built on the site of the former quarry at Barnhill. Quarrying, of course, remains an important industry in Sodbury, focussed now on what was once Hampstead farm in Old Sodbury.

In order to understand the town's economic history in the early modern period, I have been making use of probate records, wills and inventories which give some insight into the material culture and prosperity of the place. The extant inventories of Chipping Sodbury, numbering 73 between 1633 and 1730, underline the diverse range of occupations found within the town.¹ Besides the ubiquitous yeomen and husbandmen, there were a blacksmith, a butcher, a coal miner, a maltster, a shoemaker, and two saddlers. The continuing importance of the cloth trade, both production and distribution, is hinted at by the presence of a clothier, a mercer, a woollen draper, a serge weaver, and a felt maker. The beginnings of a professional service class is hinted at by the presence of an apothecary and a scrivener. As noted already, there were numerous inns and taverns in the town serving travellers along the main road that ran through the town, and five men were described as inn holders in their probate inventories (although several more for whom no occupation is listed appear also to have been innkeepers). The inventory of David Tanner gives us a glimpse inside one of these inns, probably the Swan, in 1663. Not including the innkeeper's own lodgings, there were eight rooms that could provide accommodation for

travellers in twelve beds. Two of these beds were found in the dining chamber, alongside two tables and fourteen chairs or stools. The other bedrooms also provided private dining facilities, and there were also the hall and a room at the head of the stairs where food could be taken. Some level of luxury was provided by the damask table cloths, the leather upholstered furniture and the hangings around beds, while the cellars were stocked with both beer and wine. The whole contents of the inn were valued at over £153.

Unsurprisingly, there is much less diversity of trade found in the probate evidence of Old Sodbury, where the importance of stock farming is made clear. Only three extant wills from before the Restoration (1660) make any reference to arable farming, while several testators referred to leases of pasture grounds or made legacies of cattle. Thomas Atwood (d. 1567) was engaged in both arable and stock farming on a significant scale, keeping both cows and a large flock of sheep. His contemporary Thomas a Parsonadge (d. 1572) also practised mixed farming, and his will indicated he had large amounts of corn and grass in the field, a yoke of oxen, and he made legacies of 30 cows and 40 sheep (the latter fewer than half of his flock). A third 16th-century testator, William Parker (d. 1591), left 16 cows and 80 sheep in his will. In the early 17th-century, the parish's two millers and a cutler all supplemented their trades by keeping stocking, making bequests of cows or sheep.²

Of 22 inventories valued at £100 or more from between 1662 and 1731, stock farming typically accounted for between one-third and two-thirds of the value of the inventories, whilst wheat and other crops rarely accounted for more than 2% or 3% of the total. The large amount of pasture and meadow available to the parishioners enabled them to keep large numbers of cattle and horses, and 12 inventories accounted for 20 or more cows, while four of the deceased owned four or more horses. Sheep were a rarer commodity, and only five inventories recorded more than 20 sheep, including two large flocks of 180 and 136 sheep respectively. The preponderance of cattle and the proximity to Chipping Sodbury accounts for the large amounts of cheese produced, accounting for at least 5% of the value of eight inventories, including two with over 2 tons of cheese in hand. In contrast, only two inventories reveal any significant evidence of arable farming, with 48 acres (20ha) and 20 acres (8ha) of sown wheat respectively, although in both cases the value of the arable was less significant than that of the stock. Besides wheat, the inventories reveal that barley, oats, and peas were preferred. The two arable farmers kept seven pairs of oxen between them.

What stands out from many of these inventories is the simplicity of many of the lifestyles they reveal, the apparent lack of expensive possessions, even among the wealthier residents. Henry Atwood (d. 1662) and Thomas Adey (d. 1685) both left estates valued at almost £1000, yet the possessions of Atwood included nothing more extraordinary than a great Bible and £2 of other books, while Adey owned a silver tankard, two bibles and some other small books. Instead, these particularly wealthy men had reinvested in land or loaned their money at interest. Atwood held a lease valued at £600 and was owed £110, while Adey held premises in several parishes worth in total £438, and was owed £110 in rent or loans. The vicar, William Sheene (d. 1676), unsurprisingly owned a large library at his death, valued at £50, and his possessions also included a clock, a silver cup and a tobacco box. The widow Margaret Elliot (d. 1712) owned a watch, two small cups and a snuff box, and the widow Elizabeth Brooks left silver spoons and silk scarfs. The clothier Henry Webb was in possession of a silver watch when he died in 1726, as was Joseph Webb in the following year (although perhaps this was the same watch?). William Tanner, a butcher from Chipping Sodbury, left goods and chattels in 1728 valued in total at over £700,

including leases on properties worth £487, and cattle and sheep worth £73, and yet the only luxury goods he allowed himself were some leather chairs, a silver tankard and a solitary silver spoon. Many of the town's poorer residents had to make do with pewter and earthenware goods. The poorest inventory was valued at a meagre £2 15s.

What also emerges from the probate records are the esoteric details which enables us a glimpse beyond lists of bequests or possessions to see the human side of the deceased. As genealogists are very well aware, wills can help us to understand the nature of relationships in the past. In 1560 Lady Anne Walshe of Little Sodbury bequeathed her wedding ring to one daughter, and to another daughter, Anne, the three needlework cushions made by Anne's daughter. Two centuries later, Sarah Stephens, another widow of a lord of the manor, bequeathed £100 to her servant Elizabeth Brokenborow, as 'a particular mark of my respect for her great Fidelity to me in my affairs'.³ Then there are the testators who referred to individual animals by their names. Alive Pavye of Little Sodbury bequeathed a cow called Nyghtyngall in 1571, and John Burcombe of Old Sodbury bequeathed cows called Collie and Curtis in 1613. Furthermore, Collie was left to Burcombe's daughter, from whose husband Burcombe had originally bought Collie, suggesting that the purchase might have been less a business transaction and more a means of supporting his family. Some possessions hint at the past lives of their owners, such as the sword and rapiers belonging to David Tanner of Chipping Sodbury at his death in 1663, a decade after the civil wars. And sometimes we can hear the voices of the appraisers of probate inventories, who did not always withhold judgement on the deceased's goods. In particular, among the possessions of John Jones (d. 1726) were a table, stools, chairs, boxes and irons, all described as very sorry, napkins and sheets described as 'common and ordinary', two flock beds called 'very ordinary', and a pair of andirons: 'we never saw worse'.

You'll be able to read this and much more about the economic life of the three Sodburys in Big Red Book Volume 14 when it appears in the next few years.

Alex Craven

1 Unless otherwise noted, all wills and inventories are to be found among the Gloucester Diocesan Records at Gloucestershire Archives.

2 TNA, PROB 11/122/319; PROB 11/127/110; PROB

Cheltenham and surrounding parishes

Swindon Village

More than 25 years have passed since I first started writing about Swindon. Of course, that wasn't Swindon village, but 'big' Swindon in Wiltshire. And now, if I carry through my intention to work on Swindon (Glos) for the VCH, I think I shall be the first person ever to have written the history of two Swindons – three, really, because Swindon (Wilts) is historically two places, Old Swindon and New Swindon. That just leaves the one near Wolverhampton, another near Wetherby and two on either side of the Scottish border near Alnwick.

The Gloucestershire Swindon lies immediately west of Cheltenham and is one of five parishes that will be included in our Volume 15. Now that work on Cheltenham itself is nearly complete we are intending to tackle the others and, after a very friendly evening in September with the Swindon Village Society, I volunteered to look into researching and writing about this small but interesting parish. The Society has itself published a good deal, and there is a cache of very detailed notes in the archives made in the 1950s and 1960s by a local enthusiast, R.M. Grazebrook (D 3571). An agricultural community of 100 or so inhabitants for much of its history, Swindon remains partly rural, to the north of the (now somewhat expanded) village, but downhill to the south the flattish pasture grounds have been transformed during the last 60 years into Cheltenham's 'out-of-town' development, a busy complex of industrial, business, storage and retail facilities, including car showrooms, a supermarket, estate roads and car parks.

All this contrasts with the sobriquet 'Swindon Village', which I took to be local aloofness and rustic superiority, until I started to delve into its origin. Has it, as one local tradition maintains, something to do with the railways? The main line from Birmingham passes through the parish, and very briefly (1841-4), there was a station or halt here. To distinguish it from Swindon Junction and later Swindon Town (both in 'big' Swindon) did ours become Swindon Village? I'm not convinced – though I can see of course why the affix (as place-name people would call it) is necessary.

The VCH has long shaken off its 'Victorian'



Swindon, St Lawrence's church, with horses. c. 1800. From Ralph Bigland's Gloucestershire

stuffiness, and now routinely explores the history of modern everyday life. Council housing, new towns and industrial estates are all grist to our mill. Telford was published in 1985 and Corby in 2013. I'm rather relishing the prospect of researching and writing up (or master-minding it if I can persuade our sterling volunteers to do it for me!) the story of an out-of-town development. After all, they are an ubiquitous feature of modern urban life, and they deserve to have their local history explored and documented, not just taken for granted and discounted.

John Chandler

(John was for many years our editor-in-chief, then our consultant editor and is now a trustee. We are very grateful that he has agreed to lead the research and writing of Swindon Village, one of the villages surrounding Cheltenham which will also appear in Volume 15. Ed.)

A message from Francis Boorman, one of our former Contracted Editors

The start of the new year feels like a good time for an update on what I have been doing since moving on from VCH Gloucestershire last April and you will be pleased to hear that the skills I picked up from so many of you while researching Cirencester and Stratton have not been going to waste.

I am excited to say that I finished editing a VCH short on the London parish of St Clement

Danes which was published in November. The book was not entirely without a Gloucestershire connection, as chapters on schools and charities were supplied by none other than Jonathan Comber. I hope those links are enough for you to show forbearance while I share a bit of St Clement Danes' history and of course the obligatory plug. For anyone interested in buying a copy, it can be found at www.sas.ac.uk/publications/series/vch-shorts, alongside the splendid Gloucestershire short publications, *Cheltenham Before the Spa* and *Yate*.

St Clement Danes was a Westminster parish at the heart of the capital, bordering the City of London. The parish church sits on an island in the middle of the Strand and is now the central church of the Royal Air Force. It was rebuilt by Sir Christopher Wren in 1682, but little else in the parish survives from the seventeenth century. The book charts the transformation in the physical environment of the parish, as well as its changing institutions and economy.

At the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, a string of grand aristocratic houses lay along the north bank of the River Thames. To the north of the Strand were several Inns of Chancery, where many lawyers had their chambers. Stretching up to Lincoln's Inn Fields was an area of housing and the newly-built Clare Market, where meat, fish and other food was sold. Theatres returned to the parish after they were suppressed under Cromwell, with indoor tennis courts used to stage plays until purpose-built spaces were constructed.

As the aristocracy moved to new developments further west, the big riverside mansions were built over by developers who realised the greater profits to be made from streets of townhouses. By the mid eighteenth century the parish was dominated by respectable middling sorts, independent artisans, shopkeepers and lawyers. These men ran the vestry, the local government which policed and maintained the streets and provided for the poor, alongside the parochial charities. The same group of male tax-paying homeowners had the right to vote for the two Westminster MPs. It was a restricted franchise by modern standards, but quite broad compared to many other constituencies at the time. The St Clement Danes electorate was fiercely independent, campaigning vigorously against government candidates and embracing radicals like Charles James Fox. Although excluded from

THE VICTORIA HISTORY OF MIDDLESEX

ST CLEMENT DANES:
1660–1900Francis Boorman
with Jonathan Comber and Mark Latham

voting, other parishioners participated in politics through demonstrations and social movements. For instance, in 1749 a bawdy house riot broke out at a brothel called the Star on the Strand and spread across London. The Clare Market butchers were a prominent feature in the street life of the parish, as was the noise of their famed marrow-bone-and-clever music.

As the nineteenth century wore on, slums developed around Clare Market and the quality of produce fell away. Following a police raid on a molly house (a gay meeting place) and the growth of pornographic book trade in Holywell Street, the parish gained a seedy reputation. The vestry lost many of its powers to London-wide bodies like the Metropolitan Police and the Metropolitan Board of Works. Spectacular additions to the built environment included the Victoria Embankment and the Royal Courts of Justice, but slum clearance only concentrated the poor in the remaining housing and exacerbated overcrowding. Charitable provision of local schools, a church mission and medical treatments were not enough to alleviate conditions which the reformer Charles Booth felt were 'too disgusting for words'.

The remaining slums (and medieval buildings) were swept away in the development of

Aldwych and Kingsway beginning in the 1890s, that laid out the street pattern we still see today. The local community was dismantled: most of the replacement housing was situated outside the parish and the vestry was superseded by the London County Council in 1900. I am currently working on a history of arbitration in the eighteenth century and another London-based VCH short on the parish of St George Hanover Square, which should keep me busy for a while!

Gloucestershire County History Trust

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The trustees felt it is time there was an updated photograph of themselves! From left to right: Nicholas Kingsley, David Aldred, Jonathan Comber, Alison Alden, John Chandler, James Hodsdon, Sir Nicholas Mander, Heather Forbes (Kim Kenny)