

Welcome from the Editor

Welcome to our fifteenth newsletter, keeping you in touch with the work of the County History Trust. We hope you have continued to keep safe and well during the past six months.

Our January newsletter had a stop press that Dr Louise Ryland-Epton had just been appointed to research Leckhampton parish for Volume 15. It's fitting, therefore, that in the first item of this newsletter she introduces herself. You will read later in the newsletter how she is already making good progress, supported by our very able volunteers. As you will also read below, our other two volumes have not been forgotten.

As usual, my thanks go to all who have contributed to the compilation and distribution of the newsletter, which I hope you will, once again, find interesting and informative. If you have any comments or further ideas, please let me know: dhaldred@btinternet.com.

David Aldred

Dr Louise Ryland-Epton

I am pleased to take this opportunity to introduce myself. I have been a contributor to the VCH since 2017, most recently in Wiltshire. My experience in local research and writing on Gloucestershire includes contribution to the VCH volume on Cirencester, articles for *The Local Historian* and *Midland History* and, most recently, work undertaken for my fellowship of the Royal Historical Society on the penal reformer, George Onesiphorus Paul. Originally from Cheltenham, I



am still a Gloucestershire resident and delighted to now be working on Leckhampton for Volume 15.

Since starting work on Leckhampton parish, I have been overwhelmed by the local support, including from Leckhampton historian Eric Miller and members and volunteers of the Leckhampton and Cheltenham Local History Societies. Following the re-opening of the Heritage Hub, archival research has begun in earnest. In this, I have been assisted by volunteers who have been transcribing probate documents and parochial government accounts. I am particularly grateful to Sally Self for her assistance.

Louise Ryland-Epton

VCH Gloucestershire

Newsletter 15 July 2021

pressing commitments, Jan Broadway is regretfully having to step back from her rôle as County Co-ordinator. We are considering how best to manage this important function in future. Jan is happy to continue maintaining the Academy website for the time being, but here too an extra pair of hands would be very welcome. It is a key asset and we ought to have more than one person who knows how it all works. If you think this could be you, I'd be delighted to hear from you. We thank them both for their valuable contributions to support the work of the Trust.

Report from the Trust

At the time of writing, we are shedding some of the restrictions of the last 15 months and more, but it will take some time before momentum and normality are fully restored. While huge appreciation is due to the archives staff for maintaining a safe service at the Heritage Hub over recent months, there's no doubt that everyone welcomes the restoration of easier access once again. (I hope to be taking more advantage of the Hub again myself soon, after the small domestic matter of moving house.)

Significant progress can be recorded in at least two areas – Simon Draper's investigation and writing up of the religious and landownership sections for West Littleton (down towards Dyrham) is now complete. This will soon be married up with John Chandler's treatment of the landscape and social history. Will the latter include mention of the installing of a borrowed TV set in the village hall in 1953, for residents to watch the coronation, recorded in a minute book we have been lent?

Leckhampton will be a rather bigger project, for which we have recruited Louise Ryland-Epton (introduced on previous page). It was a sign of the times that we had a very strong field of candidates for the job when we interviewed (by Zoom, what else?) back in January, and if money were no object, we could happily have engaged quite a team of talent. We are hoping that as restrictions ease, Louise can get properly engaged with Leckhampton's numerous local experts and potential volunteers.

There have been two changes to the make up of the Trustees. Alison Allden is moving away and has sadly offered her resignation. Because of other

James Hodsdon

James Hodsdon
Chairman

Updates from the Volumes

Volume 14: South Gloucestershire

Victorian and Edwardian clergymen are thought of as sober, serious men, punctilious in the discharge of their public duties and often rather formidable and humourless in their family circle. Step forward the Rev. William Ashburner, rector of Dodington from 1910-15, who neatly punctured both halves of this stereotype when he completed his 1911 census form. His household consisted of himself, his wife, their three children (aged 11, 3 and a few weeks), a nursemaid and temporary cook. In the column for occupation he described himself and his son conventionally enough as 'Rector' and 'School' respectively. However, his wife's occupation is given as 'Nursing Matron', his infant daughter was occupied in 'Feeding and sleeping and occasional enquiry' while her three year old sister was more succinctly occupied in 'Mischief'. Such whimsical

| NAME AND SURNAME | RELATIONSHIP to head of family | AGE last birthday and SEX | PARTICULARS as to MARRIAGE | | | | | | PROFESSION or OCCUPATION of Persons aged ten years and upwards | | | BIRTHPLACE of every person. | NATIONALITY of every Person born in a Foreign Country. | INFIRMITY. |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|--------|-------|----------|---------|--------|--|----------|---|-----------------------------|--|------------|
| | | | Married | Single | Widow | Divorced | Married | Single | Widow | Divorced | Profession or Service with which worker is connected. | | | |
| 1. William Ashburner | Husband | 45 | Married | | | | | | Rector | School | Dodington | English | | |
| 2. Elizabeth Ashburner | Wife | 42 | Married | | | | | | Nursing Matron | | Dodington | English | | |
| 3. Edith Mary Ashburner | Daughter | 11 | Single | | | | | | | | Dodington | English | | |
| 4. Robert Ashburner | Child | 3 | Single | | | | | | | | Dodington | English | | |
| 5. Mary Ashburner | Child | 17 | Single | | | | | | | | Dodington | English | | |
| 6. Marion Payne | Servant | 40 | Married | | | | | | | | Dodington | English | | |

1911 census return for William Ashburner



The former rectory, now Dodington Manor (Turley Heritage)

humour did not, apparently, land well with the census enumerator, who struck out these three descriptions with a heavy pencil!

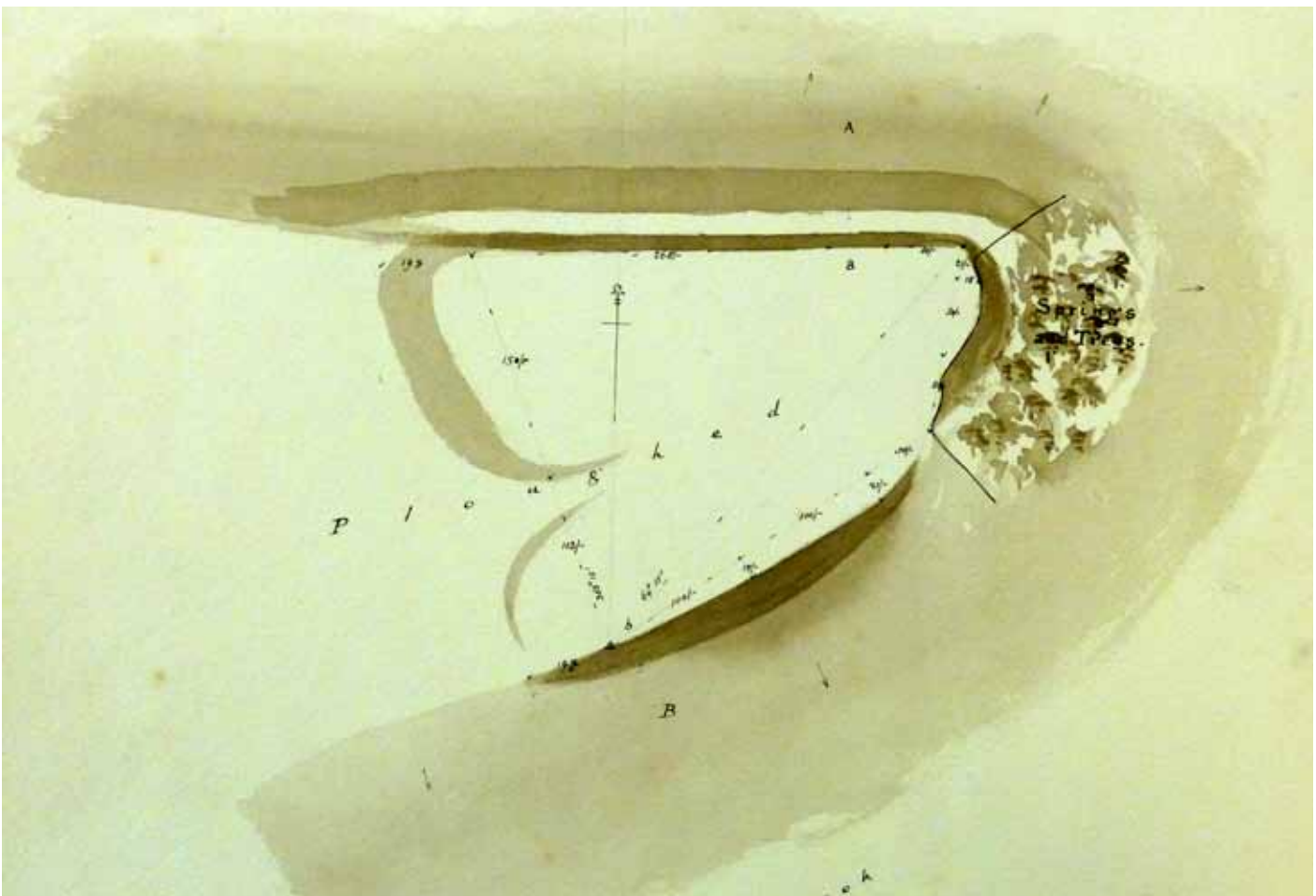
Nick Kingsley

AN ANTIQUARY AT LARGE!

Although he was the squire of Canons Ashby near Banbury (now a National Trust property) for almost the entirety of Victoria's reign, and died there in 1899, Sir Henry Dryden was a native of Gloucestershire, born at Adlestrop in 1818. He became an eminent, somewhat eccentric, antiquary and archaeologist, ranging far and wide, but retained his interest in the county and contributed papers to the *B&G Transactions*. The society visited his ancestral home in July 1930 while exploring sites and churches in the Banbury area.

I came across him when working on West Littleton, where at its eastern boundary with Wiltshire there is an earthwork once thought to be a hillfort, Hebdown Camp, and marked on

early Ordnance Survey maps, but dismissed rather sniffily by the Royal Commission as 'a geological feature partly covered by strip lynchets'. The trail led to an old National Register of Archives catalogue (14253), now digitised (GB0442) of his papers deposited in Northampton Library, which have recently been transferred to Northants Archives. The catalogue referred to notes on Littleton church, a drawing of its bell turret (both 1842), and a plan of an earthwork. Since the notes pre-dated the Victorian church restoration by some decades, and the earthwork was probably the putative hillfort, a trip to Northampton seemed in order. I was thwarted by lockdowns twice but eventually made it there earlier this month and was able to photograph not only the West Littleton material, but also to look through the rest of the Gloucestershire notes, drawings and plans, and photograph everything relating to other parishes which the VCH is working on – Acton Turville,



The supposed Hebdown camp (courtesy Northants Archives & Heritage)

Chipping and Little Sodbury, Dyrham and Leckhampton.

Dryden was a skilful surveyor, an observant church enthusiast, and a reasonably proficient watercolourist. Some of his material (over a thousand items) has been digitised by the University for the Creative Arts VADS project (<https://www.vads.ac.uk/digital/collection/HDC>), including 69 of Gloucestershire subjects, but not most of those relevant to us. He visited various sites around West Littleton in April 1842 and returned to Chipping Sodbury in 1858, where he made extensive notes on the church. Simon Draper has already amended his text on West Littleton church to include Dryden's notes, and I shall incorporate his survey of the supposed earthwork – it does look fairly convincing to me. Opposite, as a taster, is his view from Sodbury hillfort and his plan of 'Hebdown Camp' (by kind permission of Sarah Bridges, Manager of Northants Archives and Heritage Services).

John Chandler

Volume 15: Cheltenham and surrounding parishes

LECKHAMPTON

SPARROW PIE

Local wills illuminate how parish residents supported themselves through their work. However, while occupational earnings were of primary importance, another way poorer community members made ends meet has also been revealed in the local churchwarden accounts, surprisingly derived from sparrows.

These birds were considered a pest during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. So much so they were slaughtered in their thousands. Sometimes, overseers responsible for collecting local poor rates and dispensing relief, helped this massacre by paying poor people for the birds' dismembered heads. In Leckhampton, however, this encouragement surprisingly came not from overseers but from churchwardens, whose accounts reveal payments made for sparrow heads, alongside many more typical expenses such as sacramental bread and wine and repairs to the fabric of the church.

It was the sparrows' fondness for grain that usually spelt their doom. Grain production was an essential part of many rural parish economies, and not only did sparrows eat the seed, but they also damaged the stalks.

The rewards paid for their destruction provided a source of income but allowed the rest of the bird to be used as food. While 'sparrow pie' may not be on many menus today, meat was then often too expensive for the household budgets of the labouring poor. This addition, therefore, may have provided a valuable source of protein. According to one Victorian cookbook, sparrows wrapped in bacon baked in a batter made a great variation on toad-in-the-hole. Another serving suggestion advised sparrows were 'an appetising and nutritious dish when the birds are stuffed with bread and repose on a layer of steak.' Unfortunately, the Leckhampton labourers of the early 1800s, minus bacon or steak, probably made do with pie. Sadly, the birds are now in a sharp decline, but thankfully no longer a popular serving suggestion or likely persecuted by Leckhampton churchwardens.

Louise Ryland-Epton

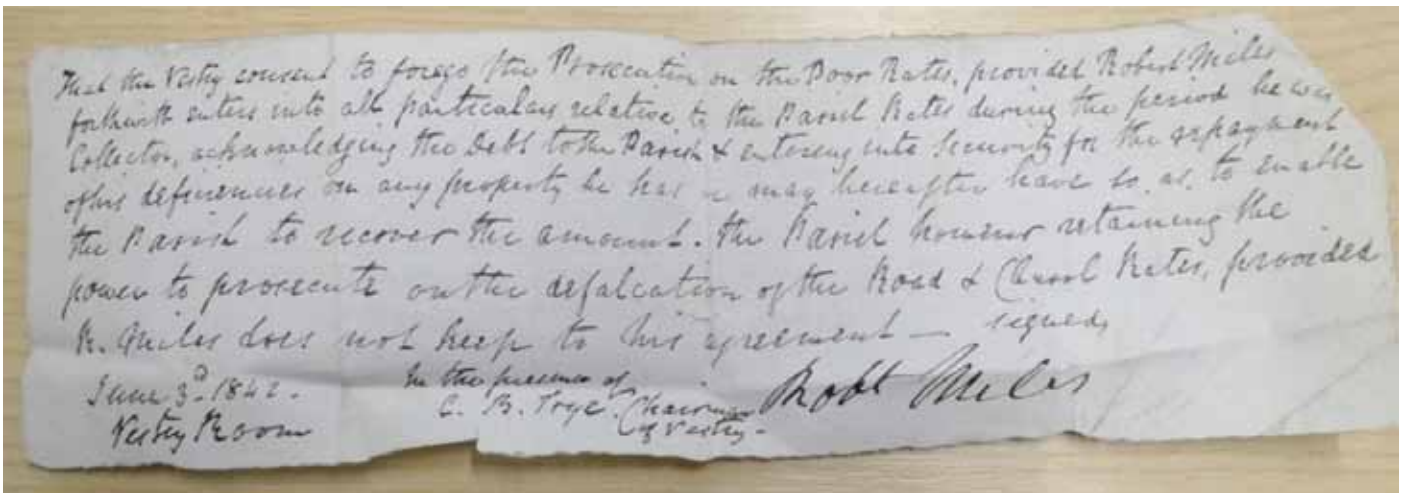
A CASE OF DEFALCATION (OR THE MISUSE OF PUBLIC FUNDS)

While researching for new source material for the parish of Leckhampton a flimsy piece of paper was found among the bundles of the Overseers' Bills (GA P198a/OV/2/4, see overleaf). The bills and receipts cover the usual range of payments for rates, examinations and removals, relief in the form of weekly payments for food, coal and medicines.

But one small piece stood out as of more interest. This note was seemingly written by Charles Brandon Trye, chairman of the Vestry and directed specifically at a gentleman called Robert Miles. Miles had been appointed as an assistant overseer and rate collector in 1840 – an undoubtedly thankless task and one he may not have fulfilled with complete dedication.

In March 1842 he had seemingly 'disappeared' and was listed as resigned in April. Robert must have re-appeared, as on the third day of June in the Vestry Room in the presence of Charles Brandon Trye and others, he put his name to the note:

That the Vestry consent to forego the Prosecution on the Poor Rates, provided Robert Miles forthwith enters into all particulars relative to the Parish Rates during the period he was Collector acknowledging the Debts to the Parish and entering into security for the repayment of his deficiencies on any property he has or may hereafter have so as to enable the Parish to



recover the amount. The Parish however retaining the power to prosecute on the defalcation on the Road & Church Rates provided R Miles does not keep to his agreement.

June 3rd 1842 Vestry Room in the presence of C B Trye
Chairman of Vestry
[signed] Robt Miles

Only ten days later, the *Cheltenham Journal and Fashionable Weekly Gazette* of 13 June stated that ‘The case of Miles, late assistant overseer for Leckhampton was “compromised.” Had the Vestry applied undue pressure? Was the case thrown out on a technicality? Had Miles simply disappeared again? Or had he shown sympathy towards the poor in the parish of which there were many and not pressed them hard enough for payment.

One will never know, but speculation in the light of more recent ‘misuse of public funds’ is intriguing. And one is reminded of the lines from Dicken’s *Little Dorrit* – ‘you are paid to squeeze and you must squeeze to pay’.

Sally Self

CHARLTON KINGS

THE PRINN, HUNT AND RUSSELL FAMILY OF CHARLTON PARK,

Twenty-first century interest in this collection, D7661 in the Archives, goes back to 2005, when images of many of the Latin documents were taken by Charlton Kings Local History Society. Transcriptions and translations were made by a group of volunteers including Kath Boothman, Jill Barlow and Elaine North led by Jane Sale, who used

them as a basis for several articles in Charlton Kings Local History Society *Bulletins*. On Jane’s death there was a lapse of several years. In February 2019 it was suggested that an item-by-item cataloguing would eventually, when funds allowed, assist VCH research for the parish of Charlton Kings as part of Cheltenham Volume 16. Ray Wilson turned the brief descriptions available in the Uncatalogued Files into digital copies and the cataloguing was begun.

Now in 2021 the cataloguing of every piece is complete, and thanks to Jill transcriptions of all the Latin documents have now been included. A feeling of minor triumph, after over two years hard work, was achieved when in the last box we came



Russell coat of arms (Gloucestershire Archives)

across the coat of arms of Sir William Russell who had traced his family history back to the Russells of Kingseat and Slipperfield in Scotland – back to, when else but 1066!

From Wikipedia

The Russell baronetcy of Charlton Park was created on 9 April 1832 for William Russell. The second Baronet represented Dover and Norwich in the House of Commons.

Sir William Russell, the 1st Baronet died in 1839, followed by the 2nd Baronet, another Sir William, who was born in 1822 and was followed by the 3rd Baronet (1865–1915). The title became extinct on the death of the third Baronet in 1915.

Sally Self

Volume 16: Cirencester and surrounding parishes

ARCHITECTURAL IMPROVEMENTS IN CIRENCESTER

We're very fortunate to have enlisted the help of Stroud-based architectural historian Mike Hill to add depth to our coverage of key buildings in Cirencester. (Mike's publications include work for the prestigious Buildings of England series – he's seen here, notebook in hand, assessing a Tudor house for the updated Dorset volume.)

His first collaboration has been with Nick Kingsley and Linda Viner, on Cirencester Park (both the mansion that hides discreetly behind the tall yew hedge, as well as its extensive lands). This joint effort has plugged a significant gap in our coverage of Cirencester, adding considerable new detail.

Mike has kindly volunteered to monitor the drafts for the other Volume 16 parishes from the buildings perspective, and bring them up to the customary VCH standard. On this theme, we are incidentally rather conscious that so far, we lack a proper review of the remaining older secular buildings in Cheltenham. It is known from limited earlier investigations that there are medieval elements lurking behind facades in the lower High Street, but to date there has been no systematic study.

James Hodsdon



Mike Hill at work (James Hodsdon)

Here is the opening paragraph of the fascinating account of the descent of the post-medieval manor. The full draft will be available at <https://www.vchglosacademy.org/> for your comments. Ed.

Cirencester Manor

The manor of Cirencester passed into the hands of the Crown at the dissolution of Cirencester Abbey on the morning of 19 December 1539, and the Crown retained it until July 1547, when it was granted to Thomas Seymour, Lord Seymour of Sudeley. He held it until his attainder and execution in March 1549, when it reverted to the Crown. The lands were then sold in 1554 to Sir Anthony Kingston, who at the time of his death was also a suspected traitor, and who actually died in Cirencester on 14 April 1556 while being escorted to London under guard. Sir Anthony had settled part of his estate on his two illegitimate sons, Anthony and Edmund, by a deed of feoffment in 1547, but which of them got Cirencester? In 1563, the manor and town of Cirencester were purchased by Sir John Danvers of Dauntsey (Wilts).

An update from across the border: VCH Wiltshire

After three years of collaboration between the Wiltshire VCH and the Bremhill Parish History Group, the manuscript of a new history of the parish of Bremhill is complete. The volume uses archival and online research, oral history testimonies and written articles from many volunteers within the community. The text covers all the areas included within a parish history in a VCH volume, but these are expanded, and emphasis has been placed on illustrating the history of the community through the experience of those who lived there. A number of case studies explore individual lives, aspects and events of interest, such as the trial of an accused local witch in 1564. The book will be published towards the end of the year.

While the book presents the culmination of this public history project, many people have also enjoyed the parish history talks, history workshops, village trails, parish newsletter articles and the project website (<https://bremhillparishhistory.com/>) that have also been created. Much of this work will continue and make an ongoing legacy. It is a testament to the project team and the community

that the project has been successfully concluded despite the challenges of the Covid-19 restrictions. I am very grateful to the community of Bremhill and to all the individuals and organisations that have helped in many ways throughout the project.

Louise Ryland-Epton

Gloucestershire County History Trust

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