



Victoria County History of Somerset Newsletter

Winter 2018—19

Issue 12

Welcome to the twelfth 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

With Bishops Hull and Norton Fitzwarren draft histories now on our website work continues on the huge task of researching Taunton. Interesting items are being uploaded onto the [VCH Explore site](#) so do go exploring! This has been a quiet period on outreach but the County Editor gave a seminar on Taunton's Slums at London University.



We had our fifth Mick Aston Lecture on 22 November once more in the Great Hall of Taunton Castle when Chris Gerrard recounted the story of young Scottish prisoners who died in Durham following the battle of Dunbar in 1650. The discovery of many of their bodies and the forensic studies carried out on their bones formed the heart of the story. However, it was also interesting to hear about those many who survived especially those who went to New England and succeeded in carving out a new life leaving many descendants.

This year of course saw the 100th anniversary of the Armistice. Among the many Somerset men who lost their lives c. 450 were from Taunton. Many families lost several men like the Cochran family of Queen Street who sent five men to war and lost one at Gallipoli and one on the Somme. Of the six male Randalls of 54 Albemarle Rd one was killed at Loos in 1915, one at Ypres in 1916 and one died of pneumonia in 1918. Henry Bond from the Store in Kingston Road joined the SLI serving in India, Egypt, Belgium, Palestine and France before dying in France on 20 Dec. 1918.

Hundreds of men returned physically and mentally ill and with disabling wounds. Among the survivors were men who had served at sea, in Egypt and in India. A less exciting but just as dangerous service was that of John Chatterly from no 3 Court, King Street, who spent his 2 ½-year war service in a tug boat ferrying ammunition from Dover to Calais. What was it like for those soldiers who returned home? Most would never have travelled so far before did they find their poor homes tolerable again? For a while in early 1919 there were huge celebrations but euphoria was short-lived as influenza and economic decline spoilt the taste of peace.



Peace celebrations in Northload Street, Glastonbury

SWHT

Women had got the vote but they had lost much of the freedom to work for reasonable wages that they had enjoyed during the war. Many Somerset manufacturers benefited from the war, not just by producing munitions, but also making army uniforms notably Fox brothers who produced puttees, essential for protecting soldiers' legs. On 11 November 1918 all the factory hooters of Taunton sounded in celebration. The war to end all wars was over but neither the peace nor Taunton's factories were destined to last for long and next year will mark the 80th anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War.

Robert Stillington (c.1410-1491) **– a problematic bishop of Bath & Wells**

Of all that long line of men who have occupied the bishopric of Bath and Wells (and of course to this point all of them have been men), perhaps one of the most noteworthy was Robert Stillington. He succeeded to that see in 1465 following the death of another celebrated incumbent, Thomas Beckington. Stillington belonged to that cadre of late medieval prelates who had spent a lengthy period of their young adulthood at one of the two universities.

Born around 1410, Stillington had gained his doctorate in civil law at Oxford by 1443 and, like many of his contemporaries, was well into his thirties before completing his university career. The collegiate system at Oxford was slowly developing at this time, and many students were attached to inns and halls rather than colleges. Stillington appears to have been associated with Deep Hall (a site now occupied by University College), and he was appointed principal there. It was only in the later 1440s that he was finally ordained to the higher clerical orders, being ordained priest in June 1447. Such a course of events was not uncommon – men destined for high office within the Church frequently came late to the priesthood. By contrast, those men who would serve as rank-and-file parish clergy typically came to the priesthood in their mid-twenties.

Stillington was greatly favoured by his fellow churchmen, gaining a series of twenty or more benefices before his elevation to the episcopate. Just as the highly fancied business leader of today can attract high rewards and numerous directorships and other positions, so too the successful prelate of the late medieval period could garner a significant number of church livings. There was of course no centralised payroll system for the fifteenth century Church, so a busy ecclesiastical lawyer and administrator was rewarded by church livings, few if any of which he would be expected to be active or resident within. A system of deputies or other vicarious appointees would carry out the cure of souls on behalf of the absentee. Stillington gained his first living as rector of Beverstone in Gloucestershire in

November 1443. This living was in the gift of the Abbot of Bristol, at this time Walter Newbery, who was abbot at that house of Augustinian canons for a period of some forty-six years. The living at Beverstone appears in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, that great valuation of Church property carried out by Henry VIII's commissioners in 1535. The entry for Beverstone shows a net value of under £15 per annum. At present-day values that equates to around £10,000, a modest but useful addition to Stillington's finances.

Stillington went on to occupy many other benefices, at least six of which were in the gift of Bishop Beckington. His other patrons included the bishops of Chichester, London and Salisbury, and especially two successive archbishops of York, John Kemp and William Booth. Some of the York cathedral prebendaries he was awarded were of significant value, so Stillington's income grew very nicely during the twenty years before he became a bishop. Two of his benefices were in the direct gift of the monarch, in this instance the Lancastrian king Henry VI. They were awarded later in the 1450s, at which point Henry's reign was about to end. This was now the period we know as the Wars of the Roses, and Henry lost his throne in 1461 with the victories of the Yorkist king Edward IV at the battle of Towton and elsewhere.

The change of dynasty does not appear to have resulted in any visible setback for Stillington's career. His positions as dean of St Martin le Grand in London and as archdeacon of Taunton and Colchester were confirmed by the new king. Indeed Stillington was favoured by the Yorkists - in 1460 he had been appointed keeper of the privy seal, a post he retained until he became chancellor of England in June 1467. As both bishop and chancellor Stillington had therefore risen to lofty positions in both Church and state, and it must have seemed that his career was set to shine brightly for the foreseeable future. Even the brief period of Henry VI's readeption, when the old king with the support of Warwick the kingmaker supplanted Edward IV and Stillington lost the chancellorship, did not cause any lasting problems for Stillington. Once Edward had regained the throne after the battles of Barnet and Tewkesbury in 1471, Stillington's appointment as chancellor resumed.



Wells, Bishops Palace

Mary Siraut

By 1473 Stillington was now into his sixties and he appears to have slowed down somewhat. He was replaced as chancellor in July 1473 by Laurence Booth, then bishop of Durham, but Stillington remained in favour at the Yorkist court. However, the first sign that things were not as serene as they might have appeared came in February 1478. For reasons that are not clear, Stillington was arrested and held as a prisoner in the Tower of London. His imprisonment was brief, and he was called before the king and council for examination. He seems to have satisfied his examiners that he was faithful to the crown and on 20 June 1478 he was granted a royal pardon. The entry on the patent roll for that day reads: "Declaration that Robert, bishop of Bath and Wells, has been faithful to the king and done nothing contrary to his oath of fealty, as he has shown before the king and certain lords; and general pardon to him."



Wells, former bishops' hall Mary Siraut

One school of thought is that Stillington may have been involved with George, duke of Clarence, one of the king's younger brothers, who had been found guilty of treason and executed on 18 February 1478. There is no direct evidence of such involvement, and the timetable of events does not satisfactorily implicate Stillington in the Clarence affair.

Stillington may have recovered his position in the eyes of the king, but a series of major events were about to shake England. In April 1483, Edward IV suddenly became ill and died at the age of only forty. His heir, Edward prince of Wales, was only twelve years old, and his reign as Edward V had only just begun when he was supplanted by his uncle, Richard duke of Gloucester, who took the throne as Richard III. It is at this point that Stillington appears to have become embroiled in the turbulent politics of the period. Richard justified his seizure of the throne by a document known as *Titulus regius*; that document states that Edward IV was of illegitimate birth, and that Edward's marriage to his queen consort, Elizabeth Woodville (the 'White Queen' of Philippa

Gregory's novel), was invalid; Edward had supposedly contracted to marry Eleanor Butler before his marriage to Elizabeth, and that would have made the marriage invalid. The blame for this document is placed by the contemporary Burgundian chronicler Phillipe de Commines squarely at the hands of Stillington who Commines calls 'ce mauvais evesque' [this wicked bishop]. There is no definite evidence to support this claim, although it is possible that Stillington was involved in drafting the petition in which Parliament called on Richard to take the throne.

The fact that Stillington was perceived as being associated with Richard's seizure of the throne would help to explain why Henry Tudor displayed hostility towards him. On the day of Henry VII's victory at Bosworth field, a warrant was issued for Stillington's arrest. He was imprisoned at York, and for punishment he was deprived of the deanery of St Martin le Grand in London, a benefice he had retained when elevated to the bishopric of Bath & Wells. However Stillington remained as a bishop, and on 22 November 1485 he was pardoned on account of

his great age and infirmity. But further drama was to follow. He appears to have become implicated in the treason of Lambert Simnel against the new king and sought refuge at the university of Oxford. Although an embarrassment to the university, Stillington refused to leave. However Henry VII sent a series of letters to the university during March and April 1488 and, after consultation with several other bishops, the university gave its consent for Stillington's removal, and he was taken into custody at Windsor Castle. It seems he was eventually released from his confinement and he died elsewhere in the spring of 1491.

The life of Stillington is therefore enigmatic. From his earlier times as a doctor of law, favoured prelate, royal servant, bishop and royal chancellor, his later years see him becoming enmeshed in the political machinations of period. Unlike many of his contemporaries who managed to survive and indeed thrive after the change of dynasty in 1485, Stillington was clearly associated too closely with the previous regime of Richard III. However the fact that he had also for some time fallen into disfavour with Edward IV in 1478 suggests that Stillington was a man who would take up a cause and not keep his opinions or his support for others concealed. Although he lived through some very turbulent times, he remained bishop until his death. Few other men at Bath & Wells can have seen such ups and downs during their period as bishop.

Des Atkinson

Dr JOHN ALLEN of Bridgwater, Physician and Inventor

In March 2018 the Museum of Somerset acquired a full-length portrait in oils of Dr John Allen MD FRS (c. 1660–1741). Dating from about 1700, it is a work of the most provincial kind which echoes faintly the manner of a more accomplished portrait painter such as Hans Hysing. Despite its artistic limitations it is nevertheless a lively and memorable representation of a remarkable Somerset personality.

John Allen was the eldest son of the Revd William Allen (1639–1719), the vicar of Bridgwater for almost 50 years. It is not known where John received his degree or his medical education, but in 1692 he emerged in the written record as an extra-licentiate of the College of Physicians of London. He made his local reputation practising as a doctor in Bridgwater, and became known to the wider world through his writing. In 1719 he published his *Synopsis Universae Medicinae Practicae*, a catalogue of diseases which records the opinions of ancient and modern authors and adds some observations of his own. It was extremely popular, appearing in numerous editions both at home and abroad.

As notable as his medical career was the place he acquired in the circle of Thomas Newcomen (1664–1729), the inventor of the first practical steam engine. Newcomen was in business as an ironmonger in Dartmouth and it may have been his family connections in Taunton and Chard which led to his meeting with Allen. Soon the two men regarded each other as friends. Allen was also an inventor in his own right, creating a new form of ship's log, developing a carriage with steel springs, and taking out a patent in 1729 for three further inventions. They included a means of propelling ships by hydraulic pressure which, if carried out, 'would have been probably the first known model of a steamship'. He was elected as a member of the Royal Society in 1730 and wrote a series of letters to the Society on subjects ranging from bridge design to solar eclipses.



Allen was involved with John Oldmixon in the Bridgwater building schemes of the Duke of Chandos and acquired one of the first completed houses in Chandos Street (now Castle Street). He is also said to have lived at The Priory, Bridgwater. He died on 16 September 1741 and was buried in St Mary's Church, Bridgwater, where his wife Frances, the daughter of John Gilbert, had preceded him in 1729.

John Allen now lives for us again in his portrait. It shows him splendidly in full-bottomed wig and wearing a crimson robe. His right hand rests on what is probably a copy of his *Synopsis* and behind him are the works of Hippocrates. Following cleaning, the portrait will be displayed at the Museum of Somerset.

Tom Mayberry

(For more about John Allen see Tony Woolrich's 'Mr Newcomen's Friend: Dr John Allen (1660–1741) of Bridgwater' in Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society, vol. 142 (1999), pp. 261–70.)

Dr John Allen MD FRS (c. 1660–1741) of Bridgwater, by an unknown artist, c. 1700

Somerset land tax returns

Having almost concluded the huge task of digitising and transcribing Somerset's tithe apportionments, the Friends of Somerset Archives are not letting the grass grow under their feet and work has already begun on their next project, to give the same treatment to the Land Tax returns.

The Somerset Land Tax returns run from c.1766 to c.1832, with a few gaps here or there and can be an invaluable tool for both family and local history. Like the tithe apportionments, they list the owners and occupiers of a given plot of land, along with the taxable value. Where other records are absent, such as deeds or good quality maps, these details can help a house historian trace back the ownership of their property well into the 18th century.

The pilot project, which has already begun, will focus on the latest returns for Taunton Deane hundred, and will digitise and transcribe each one. In the new year the full project will begin, with Taunton tithings being the priority to assist in the work towards the Taunton VCH volumes. At their AGM, the Friends' committee very generously agreed to give South West Heritage Trust the funds to purchase an A3 flatbed scanner to make better quality scans of the returns. The images will be made available to researchers in the searchroom at the Somerset Heritage Centre, and the searchable index to all the tithings will be made available on the Trust's website at the conclusion of the project.

Kate Parr

LAND TAX ASSESSMENT, 1831.

An Assessment made for granting an Aid to His Majesty by a LAND TAX, to be raised in Great Britain, for the Service of the Year One Thousand Eight Hundred and Thirty-one, in Pursuance of an Act passed in the Thirty-eighth Year of the Reign of His late Majesty Geo. III. intituled "An Act for granting an Aid to His Majesty by a LAND TAX, to be raised in Great Britain, for the Service of the Year One Thousand Seven Hundred and Ninety Eight," and of another Act passed in the Forty-second of the said late Majesty's Reign intituled, "An Act for consolidating the Provisions of the several Acts passed for the Redemption and Sale of the Land Tax into One Act, and for making further Provision for the Redemption and Sale thereof."

Assessed by the *David Rogers Charles Franklin* Assessors.

We do hereby return *Edward Gresham* as able and sufficient Persons, living within the limits and bounds of the said Parish of *Bickenhall* to be Collectors of the Money as aforesaid.

David Rogers Charles Franklin Assessors.

no. in wh.	Names of Proprietors.	Names of Occupiers.	Names or Description of Estates or Property.	Sum Assessed and Estimated.	Sum Assessed and Estimated.
	<i>Browne Rev^d</i>	<i>Himself</i>	<i>Glebe & Tithes</i>	<i>£ 2</i>	<i>16 0</i>
	<i>Burnard Mary</i>	<i>Herself</i>	<i>Burnards</i>		<i>3 4</i>
	<i>Coyne Durrill</i>	<i>Himself</i>	<i>His Estate</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>17 10</i>
	<i>Carricoat Nich^s</i>	<i>Sam^l Fear</i>	<i>Stuckys</i>		<i>16 0</i>
	<i>Cole Thomas</i>	<i>J^o Franklin</i>	<i>Lake Fluctons</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0 0</i>
	<i>Coyne Paul James</i>	<i>Himself</i>	<i>Tuamys</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0 3</i>
	<i>D^r</i>	<i>D^r</i>	<i>Colmans</i>		<i>3 0</i>
	<i>Charley Horas</i>	<i>Nich^s Willey</i>	<i>Willeys</i>		<i>3 4</i>
	<i>Franklin D^r</i>	<i>Selous</i>	<i>Bruis</i>		<i>12 0</i>
	<i>D^r</i>	<i>D^r</i>	<i>Drakes</i>		<i>3 0</i>
	<i>D^r</i>	<i>D^r</i>	<i>Ganges & Muckers</i>		<i>6 4</i>
	<i>Gange Mary</i>	<i>Herself</i>	<i>Lake Ganges</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>17 2</i>
	<i>Gange A. D.</i>	<i>Himself</i>	<i>Home & Lands</i>		<i>16 0</i>
	<i>Grubham Abt^t</i>	<i>Colo^r Grubham</i>	<i>Mills & Land</i>		<i>14 5</i>
	<i>Grubridge Capt^t</i>	<i>Dave^r Coyne</i>	<i>Lake Grosvenors</i>		<i>2 1 3</i>
	<i>Hine M^r</i>	<i>Uriah Marsh</i>	<i>Brewers</i>		<i>0 0</i>
	<i>Hine D. Collins</i>	<i>D^r</i>	<i>Wattons Green</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>12 0</i>
	<i>North Thomas</i>	<i>George Burrough</i>	<i>Nothys</i>		<i>3 0</i>
	<i>Neon Sam^l</i>	<i>W^m Symes</i>	<i>Grugy</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>6 0</i>
	<i>Portman E. Hill</i>	<i>Rich^d Burrough</i>	<i>Haystack Farm</i>		<i>14 1 5</i>
	<i>Paul John</i>	<i>James Sparks</i>	<i>Marshes</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>3 0</i>
	<i>Russell M^r</i>	<i>John Virgin</i>	<i>Shoys</i>		<i>9 0</i>
	<i>Russell John</i>	<i>Himself</i>	<i>Stuans</i>		<i>9 2</i>
	<i>Rix M^r</i>	<i>Himself</i>	<i>Lake Yards</i>		<i>3 4</i>
	<i>13 July 1831 Computed by us</i>			<i>1</i>	<i>17 0</i>

W. G. Edmond

Example of a land tax return

SWHT

The First Huish Headteachers: Thomas Rendall and Emily Reeves

Following the article in the last newsletters on the pupils of the first Huish schools, the head teachers deserve to have their story told. Shropshire gardener George Rendall provided his two sons Thomas and George with an education but could surely never have foreseen they would both end up as schoolmasters let alone that his elder son Thomas would become head of a college.

Thomas Rendall was born in Cleobury Mortimer in Shropshire at the end of 1847 and moved to Wiltshire with his parents before 1861. He later attended St Marks College in Chelsea becoming a schoolmaster and also a London University undergraduate. Before completing his degree he married gamekeeper's daughter Maria Annie Webb in December 1869 at West Kington. Thomas taught briefly at the parish school at St Mary Redcliffe in Bristol and early in 1871 was still living in East Redcliffe Parade with his wife.

It is not clear why he moved to Taunton but in 1871 he completed his BA and set up the Taunton Middle Class School in the old grammar school building before giving it up to become headmaster of the new Huish's school for boys in the same building. Life was eventful, not only was he a successful teacher but he was also ordained an Anglican clergyman and became chaplain to the Taunton Union and curate of St John's church, then the chapel of ease to Bishops Hull. His first two children were baptised there: Thomas Parry Liddon in 1875 and Emily, known as Patty, in 1876.

A photograph shows the family in the old schoolhouse wooden porch, since demolished, with Maria holding Thomas Parry and a heavily bearded, gowned and mortar-boarded Thomas with the baby in her perambulator. Shortly afterwards the family moved to 12 Victoria Street. Rendall's high church leanings were evident when his youngest child was baptised George Philip Pusey at Holy Trinity church on 14 September 1879.



Thomas Rendall with his first wife and two oldest children in the porch of the old grammar school
SWHT

Thomas had obtained his London MA in 1877 but was not satisfied. In 1880 he became a non-collegiate student of Oxford University, having resigned his headship and moved to the St Aldates area of Oxford with his family. Thomas won many prizes and scholarships at Oxford and obtained a BA in 1882. During his postgraduate study he obtained the post of principal of the Training College for Masters [Bede College] at Durham, which he held from 1885 until 1891. He received an Oxford MA in 1886, a BD in 1889 and a DD from Durham University in 1890. In 1888 his wife Maria died leaving him with three young children. However, the following year he married Emily Reeves.

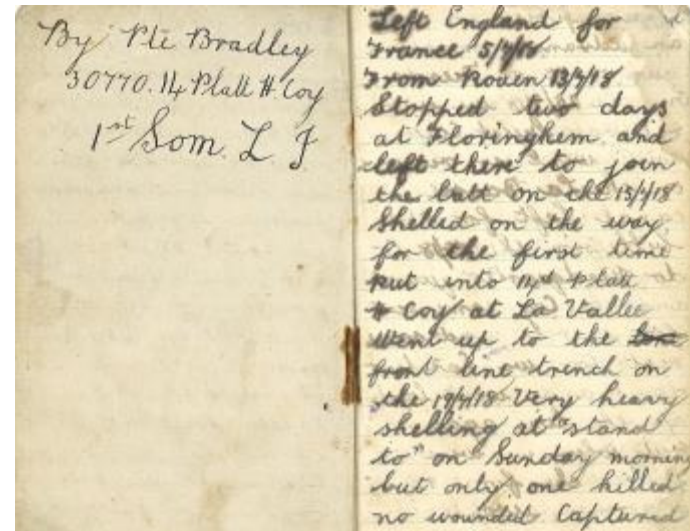
Emily Reeves was born in Australia, variously said to have been Tasmania or Geelong or Melbourne. Presumably she came to England as a girl and was fostered by the Drew family of Bradninch in Devon who provided her with a good education. She started out as a governess in Devon but still in her 20s she became head of a girls' school in Barnes and in 1875 she was appointed head mistress of the new Huish's school for girls in Taunton. Presumably she became a friend of the Rendalls and possibly their daughter was named for her. She continued as head of the school until her marriage despite severe ill health in 1888 and appears to have been very popular. However, she gave up her career to marry Thomas Rendall on the 6 July 1889 at Rauceby in Lincolnshire where her foster brother Arthur Drew was vicar and married them. Patty Rendall was one of the bridesmaids and a Tauntonian was the best man. It appears to have been a very grand wedding with the local band, sports and festivities culminating in fireworks. A full account appeared in many newspapers.

At first Thomas and Emily lived at Bede College but in 1892 Thomas became rector of Sunderland and took up residence in the rectory. His son Thomas married in 1902 and joined the army before becoming a detective constable, Patty married in 1903 and George became a schoolmaster. Thomas ended his life as rector of Ryton on Tyne living with Emily in the 16-roomed rectory known as Ryton Hall assisted by a single servant. He died on the 16 April 1915 aged 67. Emily lived on until 1929.

Mary Siraut

Private Bradley's First World War Diary

A new addition to the collections cared for by the South West Heritage Trust is a diary of a soldier, written towards the end of the First World War. This was a timely acquisition, just before the centenary of the Armistice. In the front cover of his diary, written in a small notebook, Private Bradley usefully recorded his regimental number as well as name, battalion and platoon. George William Dennis Bradley was born in Broseley, Shropshire, to John and Selina Bradley in 1900, making him eligible for service during 1918. He joined up with the First Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry, joined 14 Platoon H Company, at La Vallee on 15 July 1918 and went up to the front line trench on 19 July 1918.



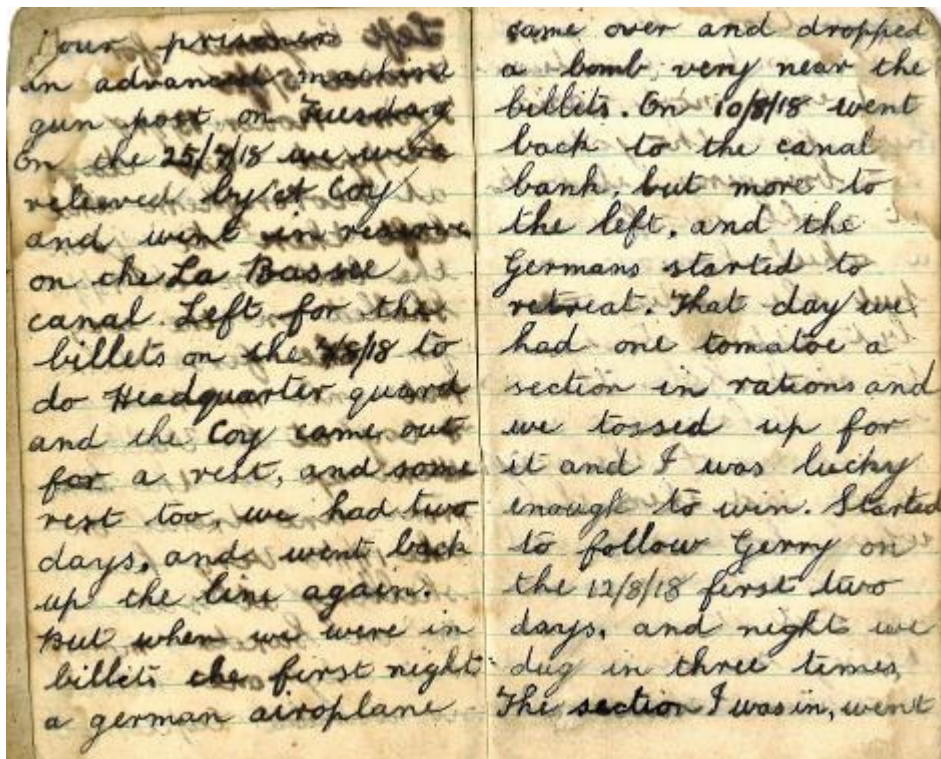
Front page of the diary

SWHT

The sporadic entries during the war are often short and to the point, with little emotion displayed. For example, his first experience of being under fire simply reads 'Shelled on the way for the first time'. Interspersed with detail about shelling and trench life are anecdotes about rations, cooking potatoes found in a French house, and sleeping on the side of the road because the Kings Own Regiment had taken over the billets.

Shortly after 15 October, Private Bradley was made an officer's servant but the officer was hit when they went over the top on 19 October. They left the fighting immediately for Casualty Clearing Station no. 22 in Cambrai. The officer returned to England whilst Private Bradley was isolated for 11 days due to a soldier at Cambrai having diphtheria. He re-joined the battalion at Haspres on 2 November. On the day the Armistice was signed the battalion was marching to Curgies, a distance of about 12 miles.

On 12 February 1919 he notes that they leave Haine-St-Pierre for somewhere unknown, as a start for England. They arrived at the embarkation camp on 15 February after marching all day and night and set foot on home soil on 18 February in Southampton. Private Bradley arrived home on 19 February about 10 o'clock, walking from Ironbridge with 5 other demobilised soldiers. He then had three months leave before re-enlisting with the Somerset Light Infantry.



A typical page from the diary

SWHT



SLI soldier in the trenches SWHT

The diary provides a brief and very personal snapshot of life on the Western Front during 1918. It is a welcome addition to our collections giving insight into a new recruit's experience of the end of the war. The entries after re-enlistment are just as fascinating, covering training, military sports, train journeys to and from home, keeping back the crowds in Plymouth during a visit by the Prince of Wales, the firing of the ships' guns at 6pm on the day of the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, the journey to Egypt leaving Devonport on 17 September and subsequent service in Egypt.

The joy of this diary is in the incidental detail, for example the day they lost the Company Sergeant Major who arrived back at camp two hours later on a horse he had borrowed; the frogs that filled up a rain water pond whilst they were away from camp and kept them awake all night; the jackal that got into the tent one night and finished a plate of bully beef; and the engine that accidentally knocked the carriages back down the incline after uncoupling for water. This brings alive the day-to-day experience of an ordinary soldier, leaving us with a very direct glimpse of life during those tumultuous final months of the First World War.

Esther Hoyle

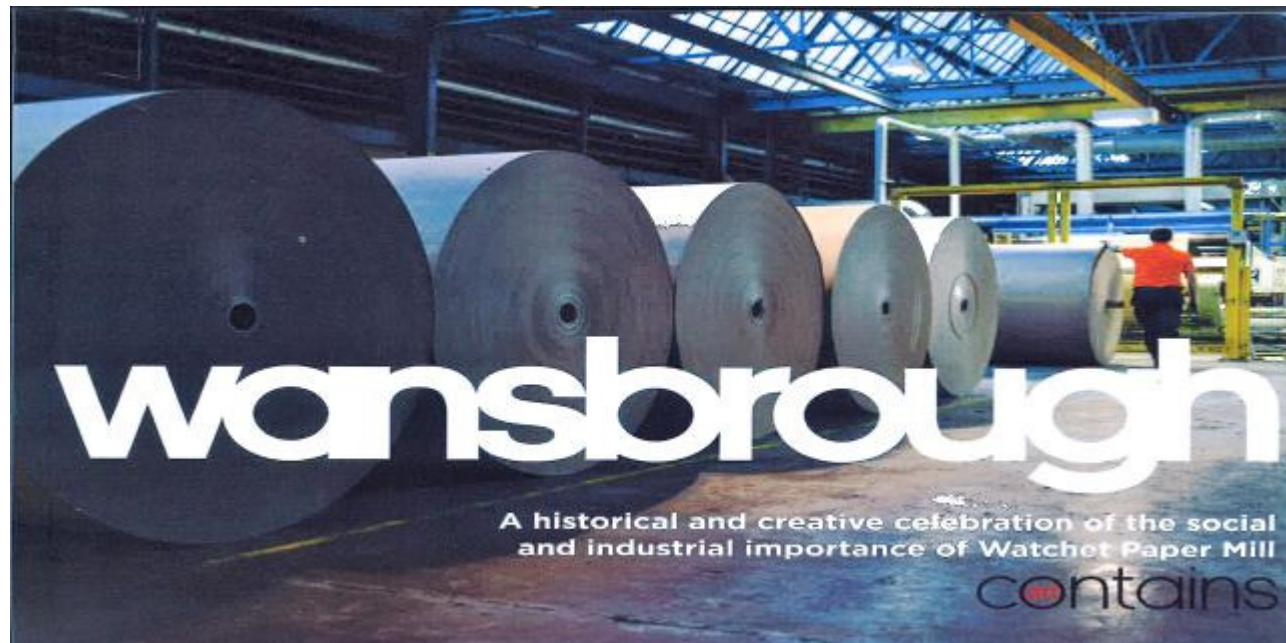
Wansborough Paper Mill, Watchet

The Wansborough paper mill at Watchet closed in December 2015 after more than 250 years of continuous activity on the site. The local community decided that the heritage and significance of this important industry should not pass without record and celebration. A local research group was coordinated by the very active Contains Art team from Watchet and with the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund and various partners, a full and detailed story of the paper works was compiled. Members of the Somerset Industrial Archaeological Society set about making a detailed photographic record of the buildings on the site and over 4000 photographs were taken of the industrial complex. The archives from the company were sorted and boxed up and they have now been delivered to the Somerset Heritage Centre for accessioning into the collections.

A local group of artists, photographers and local researchers captured the social and industrial importance of the site through oral history recordings, filmmaking, artwork, and an exhibition. The results of the research have been captured in a popular style booklet. This project represents an exemplar of how to capture local heritage and to make it relevant to people and place.

For further information on the site and a to see a 360 degree virtual tour of the site go to: <http://www.containsart.co.uk/wansbrough.html>
The site was sold in 2017 and demolition of the buildings is now underway, the end of an important era in the history of Watchet.

Bob Croft



Nuggets from VCH research

Josiah Lewis, a Taunton Dick Whittington

Research throws up interesting documents, not all of which are to be trusted. One of these is the dance card of Taunton Mayor, Josiah Lewis for the Mansion House Ball in October 1905 which bears the name of the Queen and other royalty. What a coup for the son of a poor labourer to dance with the Queen. However, reading on soon showed it to be untrue, presumably a family member later scribbled the names in; Mrs Peter Gurney and Mrs Bill Brewer further down the card rather gave the game away!

The life of Josiah Lewis is a true rags to riches story. He was born on 18 October 1845 into a large family of paupers, nonconformist labourers living in a cottage on Wincanton Common. Possibly he was the brightest of the family for unlike his older brothers he was spared labouring and apprenticed to a tailor. In 1865 he went to London to learn more of the tailoring trade. He returned to Somerset and in 1870 he married Ellen Norah Frost of Mill Street, Wincanton, known as Norah. Her father and elder brother were thatchers, another brother was apprenticed to a tinsmith and her mother and sisters were straw bonnet makers and dressmakers and may have worked with Josiah's sister who was also a seamstress. Already Josiah was moving out of the sphere into which he was born.

The newly-weds set up home with one of her sisters, a dressmaker, in North Street, Taunton where Norah ran a toy shop and Josiah worked as a tailor. Over the next decade or so they had nine children, although only six survived their father, and Josiah built up a prosperous business soon becoming an employer and a freemason in 1883. By 1891 they had moved to 9 The Crescent and by 1901 to number one, where Josiah spent the rest of his life.



The shop Josiah built from an 1890 guide

SWHT

He continued to work in his tailoring business at 11 North Street, now a charity shop, which he had rebuilt in the 1880s with work and cutting rooms. He specialised in hunting and riding outfits.

Josiah joined the town council in 1894 and in 1904 he was elected Mayor of Taunton. He continued to prosper but described himself as a tailor or outfitter until his death. He was painted wearing his mayoral robes and chain of office by the artist Charlotte Blakeney Ward. He served as an Alderman, JP and chairman of the Taunton Education Committee but failing health forced him to retire from the council in 1913 although he continued to attend to his business until the day he died.



Josiah Lewis and his wife Norah

SWHT

Josiah was a member of the Silver Street Baptist Church where he taught at the Sunday School, ran the men's bible class and was president of the adult school held at the Friends Meeting House. He was a supporter of adult education, the public library, the College of Art and the YMCA.

He died on 15 May 1915 aged 69 and his funeral was held at Silver Street Baptist Church on 20 May. He left an estate worth nearly £14,000, no mean feat for the son of a poor labourer even if he did not get to dance with Queen Alexandra!

Mary Siraut

Forthcoming Events

We hope to arrange a visit to Halswell House at Goathurst in May. This is one of Somerset's important family houses now being rescued from a problematic recent history. Confirmation of the event will be sent to mailing list subscribers.

Notices of spring and summer walks will also be circulated nearer the time.

Please Support Us

Plans for further work are entirely dependent on public generosity.

If you would like to support the future work of the Somerset VCH please consider making a donation or legacy to the **Somerset County History Trust** [Registered Charity Number 1161263]. For more information contact:

Victoria County History of Somerset

Somerset Heritage Centre, Brunel Way, Norton Fitzwarren, Taunton, TA2 6SF

vch@swheritage.org.uk

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.

Historic image of Somerset



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An early colour photograph of The Ball at Dunster. Note the blind and the climbing topiary. These cottages face south looking down High Street to the castle and the little pentices over doors and windows help protect them from the weather as well as matching the older houses in High Street. There is already an interesting mix of casements and sash windows.

There may have been an early access to the priory here but the street was first laid out in the 17th century when it was known as Priory Ball from its situation on a small hill not far from the priory site. Barns here were converted to dwellings before 1742. The area was redeveloped in the mid 19th century. Six cottages were built c. 1838 adjoining two older cottages. The street was extended as Priory Green, across the old Priory farmyard under its early 19th-century archways and out into St George's Street.

John Tudball, coachbuilder, held the end cottage by 1891, presumably supplying the private carriage trade, possibly including the one, two, three and four-horse closed or open carriages hired out by the Luttrell Arms. A coach painter, the stationmaster, a blacksmith, several dressmakers and a family of painters and decorators were his neighbours in 1901. The carriage building business at the Ball survived until the 1920s and comprised a carpenters shop, paint shop and stores in 1910.