



Friends of Wiltshire Victoria County History

The Victoria County History of England

Friends of Wiltshire VCH

WVCH Trust Registered Charity No 1196961 (formerly 1102882)

Newsletter No 21, December 2022

The Newsletter of the Friends of the Wiltshire Victoria County History, keeping you in touch with news, events and fund-raising.

End in Sight for Wiltshire VCH Chippenham Volume 20

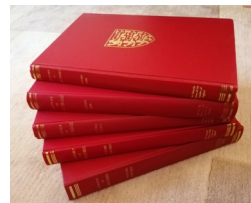
Producing a volume of the Victoria County History is a major project involving very many hours of careful research and writing, but the end is now in sight for Chippenham.

All the chapters about Chippenham itself have been written and are now being edited by our consultant editor Dr John Chandler. The volume is completed by descriptions of the seven parishes lying adjacent to the town, and five of these are now written with the last two under way.

2023 will see the last editing completed, the introduction to the volume written and the many plans, diagrams and photographs specified and obtained. All this will lead to the day in early 2024 when we hand the completed work over to the Institute for Historical Research at the University of London for final checking, review and indexing before it goes to the publishers ready for a launch in early 2025.

It is a long process— though most of the draft text is already available online via our website, wiltshirehistory.org—but the end result will be the latest in this uniquely authoritative series, a volume which will be consulted for many years to come.

And in the meantime Volume 19 for the Mere area is also approaching completion, and volume 21 for South East Wiltshire is well under way. The generosity of our supporters is helping to keep this mammoth project moving steadily forward.



IN THIS ISSUE

News of soon to be published volumes 1

John Leland online talk 2

Wiltshire Rotten Boroughs and Reform online talk 2

Research Gems 3

Fundraising 3

Future Events and Easyfundraising 4

Contact details 4

As mentioned above, the Institute of Historical Research home of the VCH since 1933, oversees the publishing of the 'big red books' at the University of London. The future publishing of the red volumes has recently been assured by publishers Boydell and Brewer and recent and earlier print volumes from the VCH Red Book Series can still be purchased from them. E-book versions of the books will also be available from the publisher from the date of publication.

In addition to this all new red books will be added onto the British History Online, as they become available, making the information accessible to everyone. Interestingly, in 2021 BHO pages were accessed 2,404,354 times by readers all over the world and 30% of BHO's 750,000 monthly page views were of VCH content. Nearly all Wiltshire volumes are already available online on BHO.

John Leland: A Tudor Traveller in Wiltshire

Another in our series of on-line talks, which have been highly successful and regularly attract an audience of around 50, was given on the 5th October by John Chandler. John is our Consultant Editor and extremely knowledgeable about the history of Wiltshire.

John Leland (1503-1552) has been described as “the father of English local history” and is much quoted in travelogues. An orphan, he was lucky to have a wealthy patron, which enabled him to attend St Paul’s School London and both Cambridge and Oxford Universities. A perpetual student, he took holy orders to secure a living and with two benefices in Wiltshire lived the life of an intellectual, mixing with other intellectuals and becoming well known at Court: apparently helping to arrange Anne Boleyn’s coronation.

From 1533, with the permission of the King, he travelled around England creating a survey of monastic libraries and making copious notes, although the books were not well kept and items appeared to be missing. He was able to find evidence of Tudor genealogy, possibly back to King Arthur with whom he was fascinated.

Through this survey Leland tried to make sense of the topography of the country and this prompted him to make 5 journeys around England and Wales with the aim of writing a series of great books. The notes he made on these journeys were highly valued by scholars and by the 1630s were deposited at the Bodleian, where they remain.



Malmesbury Abbey Grounds

In 1542 Leland travelled through Oxfordshire to Wiltshire and writes about Chippenham and Bath before heading to Cornwall, Devon and Dorset and then back through Salisbury and Winchester. In 1544 he was once again in Wiltshire, travelling from Bath to Devizes.

His 1542 description of Malmesbury describes 4 gates

all in ruins; a town built later within a castle; and the Abbey Spire, taller than Salisbury, which fell down. He also mentions the local cloth working trade.

Leland travelled by horse and riding the river bank south from Malmesbury he mentions Draycot Cerne, Bradenstock Priory ruins, Corsham, Hazelbury and Chapel Plaistow. He also listed all the bridges to be crossed on the way.

In Salisbury he described the settlements of Harnham and Fisherton, which we now consider part of the city. In Devizes he noted the imposing castle and somewhat sloping site. In Steeple Ashton he was impressed by the church.

Although he travelled many miles it is thought that he also included some descriptions of places by other people in his extensive notes.

In February 1547 Leland suffered a mental breakdown and was no longer able to work. What he had achieved already, however, amounted to 5 volumes published in 1906-1910. In the 1980s John Chandler pitched the ‘foolish’ idea to create a modern English version arranged by County. This took several years and was not completed until 1993, but has been recently revised and in April this year was re-published.

(John Leland Itinerary: A version in modern English, edited by John Chandler, Hobnob Press)

Wiltshire Constituencies and the 1832 Reform Act

Our final on-line talk of the year was given by our Vice Chairman Michael Hodges on the 23rd November and served as a follow up for those of us who joined the Stratford-sub-castle walk with David Richards earlier in the year.



Plaque commemorating
The Parliament Tree at Old Sarum

Michael began by explaining about the pocket and rotten boroughs, where a very small electorate was controlled by one person or family, and how that related to Wiltshire. The 1832 Reform Act was the first electoral reform since the Middle Ages and before then MPs were elected very unfairly with a bias towards rural counties. Most boroughs in Wiltshire returned 2 MPs to Parliament from 1295, although some were established later.

Great Bedwyn, for example, a pocket borough, was controlled by the Bruce and Brudenell families: the Marquess of Ailesbury and the Earl of Cardigan. Both seats were lost under the 1832 reform.

Old Sarum, the 'rottenest' borough in the entire country, continued to return 2 MPs despite the settlement being moved to New Sarum (Salisbury) in 1226. Both Old Sarum and Salisbury returned 2 MPs in 1295. Old Sarum was bought in 1691 by Thomas Pitt from Lord Salisbury, in the late 18th century William Pitt the Elder was an MP here.

With no residents, the landowner continued to nominate tenants to vote and in 1802 elections were held in a cornfield under a tree—The Parliament Tree—with only 5 electors present, but still managing to return 2 MPs, Nicholas Vansittart and Henry Alexander. The constituency was totally disenfranchised in 1832, becoming part of the Wilton constituency.

Other notable names in the county before 1832 were Joseph Neeld of Grittleton Manor, John Methuen and Henry Addington in Devizes, the Beckfords in Hindon, the Herberts in Wilton and Robert Peel, Chippenham MP in 1812 and founder of the modern police force.

In 1831 The Reform Bill was passed by one vote and Earl Grey eventually managed to get the Act passed with the help of public pressure and the creation of new peers to ease its path. Following the Reform the county was split into North and South Wiltshire, each returning 2 MPs. Calne, Malmesbury, Westbury and Wilton all were allocated one MP and, Chippenham, Cricklade, Devizes, Marlborough and Salisbury two MPs, a total of 18 MPs for the county.

Research Gems

We thought readers might like to hear about some of the small side-lights on history which come up so frequently in the researches of our editors and may not make it into the volumes. Here is one gem found by Rosalind Johnson.

Staying away from School in South-east Wiltshire

School log books are a valuable source for the history of education in a parish and often give an insight into the life of the community outside the school itself. In the log books for Landford and Whiteparish are entries throughout the 19th century regarding children being absent during haymaking and harvest. The children might stay away for other seasonal reasons: in the autumn of 1868 Whiteparish boys were collecting acorns (possibly to feed pigs), and in the autumn of 1877 the girls were nutting and blackberrying. The weather also affected attendance, with many children absent from Landford school one wet and windy day in November 1863. These absences seem to have been accepted as almost inevitable, but the Whiteparish schoolmistress's displeasure was evident in August 1877 when many girls were allowed by their mothers to stay away from school 'simply to see a wedding take place'.

There is one intriguing reason for low attendance, the 'wheelbarrow fair' in the village recorded by the Whiteparish schoolmaster on Christmas Eve 1863. This fair is a subject of ongoing research, as neither the school log book nor a search for press reports in the online British Newspaper Archive have as yet yielded any further information about this event. *Rosalind Johnson.*

Fundraising

The main aim of the Trust continues to be raising funds to be able to engage professional historians for the very extensive research that goes into the writing of our volumes, each of which costs at least £150,000 for research alone. So with 3 volumes in progress, we are keen to attract new supporters and Friends.

If you are reading this Newsletter, but have not yet become a **Friend**, please consider joining. Full details of how to contact us appear on page 4.

We also continue to receive donations by online shopping via **Easyfundraising**, with 7,000 brands on board ready to make a donation – including John Lewis, Liberty, Selfridges, Lakeland, Tui, First Choice, Booking.com and M&S – and it won't cost you a penny extra to help us raise funds.

WVCH Trust have raised over £500 through Easyfundraising so far, but it could be a lot more. If you still have Christmas shopping to do please consider registering and help us raise more. Full details on P4.

Forthcoming Events

Please save the date for our Summer Event 2023, which will be held at
Bewley Court, near Lacock on Thursday 8th June

And our first online talk of the year will be on Wednesday 17th May,
by Caroline Dakers on *The Houses of Fonthill*

(Booking details to follow)



In the mean time

we would like to wish all our Friends and supporters
A very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

RAISE FUNDS FOR US WITH YOUR ONLINE SHOPPING

Please support Wiltshire Victoria County History Trust by raising free donations when you shop online through **Easyfundraising**. Your holiday booking could earn us donations!

If you haven't signed up yet, it's easy and completely free. Over 7,000 brands will donate to us when you use Easyfundraising to do your everyday online shopping—with no catches and at no extra cost to you. Every donation you raise makes a difference to us so please sign up today.

Simply go to the www.easyfundraising.org.uk website,
select Wiltshire Victoria County History Trust as your cause,
register and start shopping.

You can also download a reminder button to your desktop, which will remind you if you shop with a company that is part of the scheme. Once you have done this the button will prompt you if you are browsing a company that belongs to the scheme, so you will never forget.

<https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk>

If you are reading this Newsletter but you are not yet a Friend of WVCH please contact our Hon. Treasurer,
Teian Dallaway, at wiltshirevch@gmail.com
Subscription rates are £20 pa single, £30 couple, £50 club/society, £100 corporate, £500 life

Considering making or updating your will? Please consider leaving a legacy to the WVCH Trust.
A gift in your will is an excellent way to support causes which are important to you and, as charities are exempt from inheritance tax, it can also be tax-efficient for you.

This newsletter is distributed electronically to all those members and supporters who have supplied email addresses and given their express permission for us to contact them in this way, so saving on postage costs in the future and also ensuring that more of your contributions go towards the writing of the VCH.
Our newsletters are also available to read on our Web-site: <https://www.wiltshirehistory.org>
gilalder55@gmail.com