

# VCH Wiltshire Newsletter



INSTITUTE OF  
HISTORICAL  
RESEARCH

SCHOOL OF  
ADVANCED STUDY  
UNIVERSITY  
OF LONDON



WILTSHIRE VICTORIA  
COUNTY HISTORY TRUST



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The Newsletter of the Wiltshire Victoria County  
History Trust, keeping you in touch with news, events  
and fundraising

**Issue Number 24**  
**December 2023**

## What is History?

History is the study of change over time and I was reminded of this when I heard an item on the local radio in July of this year.

Monks Chapel, between Gastard and Corsham, had decided to have its Christmas Carol Service in July, complete with mince pies and Christmas tree. This practice was begun in 2010 when snowfall prevented the winter carol service going ahead and has become an annual event.

Now a United Reform Chapel, Monks Chapel was built in 1662 by Quakers. It is just over 5 miles from Chippenham, which was fortuitous because the 5 Mile Act of 1665, which required ministers to take an oath and use a fixed form of service and the New Book of Common Prayer, meant that nonconformist Ministers who did not agree were bound to stay at least 5 miles from the town boundary.

Built to resemble a house, to avoid the attention of the authorities, it was sold by the Quakers in 1690 to Independents, became Congregational and, more recently, United Reform. Notable for its pretty eyebrow window, it also retains internal fittings from the late 17th century, including box pews, a gallery and a tall pulpit.

On July the 2nd around 70 people gathered to sing carols and listen to lessons, so this wonderful example of the history of Nonconformist worship is moving with the times. In years to come historians will be intrigued by this quirky addition to the chapel's history.

*Gil Alder*



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## Work in Progress

As reported in our last newsletter, we have reached a landmark in our progress as research is now completed for Volume 20, the Chippenham area volume, and final editing is taking place. We very much hope to be ready to publish before the end of 2025, but we are now entering the long phase of making everything ready to hand to the publishers.

We are still busily fundraising for work on Stourton and Maiden Bradley, the two remaining parishes to be covered for Volume 19.

The south-east Wiltshire volume (21, Alderbury and Frustfield hundreds) continues to move forward. The research on Clarendon is very near completion and work on Alderbury itself has also begun.

Details have now been finalised for a series of Workshops at the Wiltshire and Swindon History centre, arranged jointly with the University of the West of England. Wiltshire VCH researchers together with other VCH colleagues will teach a series of workshops on researching local history, beginning in the new year (see page 5 for more details).

As always, the four researchers are immensely grateful to the VCH Trustees and Fundraising Group for making our work possible, and to James Holden and the Project Group for steering and overseeing what we do.

## New Leaflet

We have recently devised and printed a new information leaflet outlining the work of the Wiltshire VCH and introducing us to those who may not have heard of us. The leaflet is intended to be distributed through museums, libraries and other places where those interested in history will see it.

It covers the origins and aims of the Victoria County History and how we work towards the research and publishing of our iconic red volumes. There is also information about how people can help towards this end by donating to the funds needed to cover our overheads.

A copy of the new leaflet is included with this newsletter and is also attached for those of you who receive our newsletters by email.

## Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre

If you were considering visiting the centre over the holidays, it is now closed until the 9th January for refurbishment.

## Meet the Trust

**JOHN CHANDLER, AUTHOR AND CONSULTANT EDITOR**



John was brought up in Devon and read classics at Bristol University, completing his doctorate in 1977 on religion and politics in the later Roman empire.

He trained as a librarian and worked in Wiltshire until embarking in 1988 on a freelance career of writing, lecturing, researching for archaeological units and publishing local and regional history.

John has worked for the Victoria County History (VCH) for some 15 years, in Wiltshire (Codford), Herefordshire (Ledbury) and Gloucestershire, where as county editor from 2011 he completed a volume on parishes near Gloucester, and has planned and contributed to three further volumes.

Since 2016 he has also served as consultant editor in Wiltshire, contributing West Knoyle to volume 19 and parts of Chippenham to volume 20, which he is overseeing. Having lived at various addresses in Wiltshire for 40 years, he moved to Gloucester in 2014.

John's interest in history and topography began as a teenager and became his full-time occupation when appointed Wiltshire's local studies librarian in 1979.

The VCH, with its exhaustively researched and carefully referenced text, has always been the bedrock for studying Wiltshire's history and places, and John is anxious to see it continue and complete its coverage of the county.

## Side-lights on history from our researchers

### Clarendon Palace excavation correspondence, 1933-1939

One of the joys of VCH research is experiencing the generosity of other historians and researchers with their time and with their personal collections. While working on the Clarendon Park contract for Volume 21 on south-east Wiltshire, I have had the opportunity to look through an archive, currently in private hands, of correspondence relating to the excavations held between 1933 and 1939 at the Clarendon Palace site. Though a ruin today, it was one of the great royal palaces of medieval England, and famously the scene of Henry II's rift with Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1164.

Much of the correspondence consists of letters to Tancred Borenius (1885-1948), director of the excavations. Borenius, originally from Finland, had moved to England before the First World War, established himself as an art historian and, in 1922, became the first professor of the history of art at University College London.

Borenius' correspondence was substantial and his correspondents a hugely varied group. Archaeologists, museum directors, county archaeology societies, peers of the realm, local antiquarians; all wrote to him variously offering or seeking information, requesting a visit to the palace site, inviting him to a lecture, and sometimes enclosing contributions towards excavation expenses.

Frank Stevens, director of what was then the Salisbury, South Wilts and Blackmore Museum in St Ann Street, Salisbury, wrote to Borenius on several occasions, in particular to arrange a lecture by Borenius on the Clarendon excavations to a meeting of the Wiltshire Archaeological Society in 1934. The event was to begin with a reception at 8pm, followed by the lecture. Stevens warned Borenius, possibly with his tongue slightly in his cheek, that Cunnington (honorary curator of Devizes Museum) was anxious that the evening conclude in reasonable time for the comfort of Society members. '[H]e wants the meeting on the 1st August to end at 10pm so that the elderly birds can get back to roost!'

The Clarendon Palace excavations were not only of interest locally; they attracted attention further afield. The Rotary Club of Salisbury invited Borenius to speak at a luncheon, but invitations also arrived from the

Oxford Architectural and Historical Society and the Cambridge Antiquarian Society, while in 1938 Borenius was one of six speakers giving talks to a lecture series organised by the University of London Institute of Archaeology. Several groups visited the excavations themselves. The British Archaeological Association, the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society and the Hampshire Field Club were all among those who visited the site.

Other requests arrived from individuals wishing to visit the excavations. One correspondent wrote in 1933 that he hoped to visit with 'Dr Wheeler'; this would have been the archaeologist Mortimer Wheeler. Wheeler would go on to achieve national fame for his appearances on the BBC quiz programme *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral* in the 1950s; he was knighted in 1952. Nikolaus Pevsner, art historian, later known for his *Buildings of England* series, wrote in 1937 that he would like to see Clarendon 'again'. Pevsner had come to England in 1933 when he lost his university post in Germany because of his Jewish parentage, so it is intriguing that he told Borenius that he was sorry he was unable to write earlier as he had been in Germany for three weeks.



View of Salisbury and its cathedral from the Clarendon Way

Not all prospective visitors were archaeologists or historians. In 1936 Nan Lucas wrote from Woodyates Manor on the Dorset/Wiltshire border to request a visit for herself and the writer Hilaire Belloc, who would be visiting her for the weekend. A particularly enthusiastic letter survives from Edith Olivier, writer and later mayor of the town of Wilton, near Salisbury, addressing Borenius familiarly as 'Dearest Tancred' and signing off 'My love, Edith'. 'I want to sit by while they uncover the treasure, & even dip in my spade & bucket!' she wrote, before giving Borenius news of 'Stephen'

languishing in hospital; this was almost certainly Stephen Tennant, one-time 'Bright Young Thing' and part of the circle of younger artists and writers she gathered around her.

Some correspondents had a particular expertise or wrote to Borenius to share information. George Engleheart, whose 15th century home of Little Clarendon was in the village of Dinton near Salisbury, explained why the house had got its name. According to Engleheart, there was a tradition that the house had belonged to Henry Hyde, father of Edward Hyde, 1st Earl of Clarendon. Engleheart had added 'Little' to the house name because letters addressed only to 'Clarendon' were being delivered to the other Clarendon! After Engleheart's death his widow left Little Clarendon to the National Trust, which still owns the property, although it is not usually open to the public.

John Manners, 9th Duke of Rutland, was an expert on medieval floor tiles and a frequent correspondent. In February 1933 Rutland invited Borenius to visit him at his seat, Belvoir Castle, now in Leicestershire. It is not clear if this visit took place, but in July that year he was glad that Borenius had enjoyed a visit to Haddon Hall, Rutland's home in Derbyshire, and was looking forward to seeing him again at Clarendon. A letter in August 1935 was written '[i]n great haste', but did enclose a no-doubt welcome cheque towards the excavation expenses.

Funding the excavations seems to have been a continuing concern and Rutland was not the only correspondent to give financial support. Grants also came from the Society of Antiquaries, but though in 1933 Borenius received at least £50 from this source, by 1936 the Society regretted that, owing to many other demands on its funds, it could only grant him £20.

Unemployed men came to work on the excavations in a series of camps organised by King's College, University of London, but by 1937 the country's economic situation threatened cutbacks to the scheme as less funds were being raised to support the camps. Other unemployed men were recruited locally. An undated letter to Borenius' assistant, John Charlton, from L.D.Bray of Farley village near Clarendon Park, asked Charlton to let him know when the excavations would be starting again as he would be willing to work on the site and could get him other men, all of whom would be interested in the work, 'as there is not much going on here at present'.

Borenius was an early interviewee on the then-new

medium of television. The BBC wrote to him on 28th August 1939 about his forthcoming appearance on the programme *Picture Page*, to be transmitted the following Thursday evening, 31st August. Less than 24 hours after the broadcast, on Friday 1st September, war became inevitable. Television broadcasting was shut down for the duration of the war and Clarendon Palace left to be undisturbed by archaeologists for a quarter of a century.  
*Rosalind Johnson*

### Wassailing

Wassailing is an ancient tradition with Pagan roots. Traditionally wassailing took place on the twelfth night after Christmas and often involved visiting a nearby orchard for singing, dancing, drinking and general merrymaking. Local traditions differ, typically however, rituals included drinking from a communal wassail bowl filled with warm spiced cider, perry or ale. This happened in Langley Burrell, along with the collection of money, excessive drinking and the singing of the Langley wassailing song and carol. John Cozens recounted to the Victorian diarist, Francis Kilvert, that local wassailers 'were famous for being the best in all the country around. No one could beat them or come anighst [sic] them. They used to go to both the Langleys, both the Tythertons, Draycot, Chippenham, etc.' Kilvert also recorded the lyrics of both songs in his diary entries, the words suggesting very much what was on the wassailers' minds during the holiday season. The wassailing song began: -

We'll sail and we'll sail all over the town,  
Our toast is white and our beer is brown,  
Our bowl it is made of the maples tree  
So here my bold fellows I'll drink to thee

He that do fill our bowl with the best  
I hope in heaven his soul will rest  
And he that do fill our bowl with the small,  
Down fall butter, bowl and all.

How long the tradition had been observed in Langley Burrell is impossible to determine with any accuracy. In the Victorian period, however, the world was changing fast and ancient traditions, such as the Langley wassail, were under threat. By 1873 the 'wassailing set' in Langley Burrell had broken up and the wassailing bowl, by then 'worm eaten' was being used to feed fowl. It was gifted to Kilvert by Cozens, himself a former wassailer and had subsequently, to my knowledge, been lost to history along with the Christmas tradition of the Langley Burrell wassail.  
*Louise Ryland-Epton*

## Farming records in the 16th century

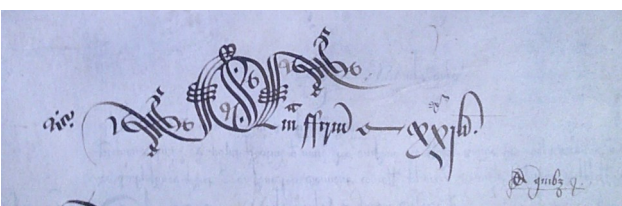
The Reformation had far reaching consequences in many English parishes. For researchers working on the Victoria County History it sometimes resulted in the documentation of local conditions that would otherwise be unknown to us. In 1537 the Court of Augmentations produced their annual accounts for the lands of dissolved monasteries that had fallen into the hands of the Crown. They were far more detailed than the assessments that had been made for the national survey of monastic lands, the Valor Ecclesiasticus, two years earlier.

At Alderbury in south-east Wiltshire we find that the farm of the small manor of Whaddon had been leased for 21 years on 16th October 1532. Leasing manors and granges had been quite common before the Dissolution and 21 years was a standard term. What makes this record unusual (and particularly useful for the 21st century researcher) is that the auditors chose to record the stock that had been included in the lease.

The farmer of Whaddon took on the farm with 20qtrs of wheat and 30qtrs of barley to be used both as seed to be sown when he ploughed the arable and to feed the farmer and his workers. To plough the fields he had 8 oxen worth 14s each with their 'necessary apparatus'. The other livestock comprised 18 cows worth 10s each, 4 heifers worth £1 16s 8d, 10 pigs worth £1 6s 8d, (piglets worth 12s), 207 wethers (castrated male sheep) worth 1s 6d each, 342 ewes worth 1s each, 460 hogasters (one year old sheep) worth 12d each, 1 gander, 4 geese, 2 capons, 2 cocks and 18 hens. For winter feed there were 30 wagon loads of hay.

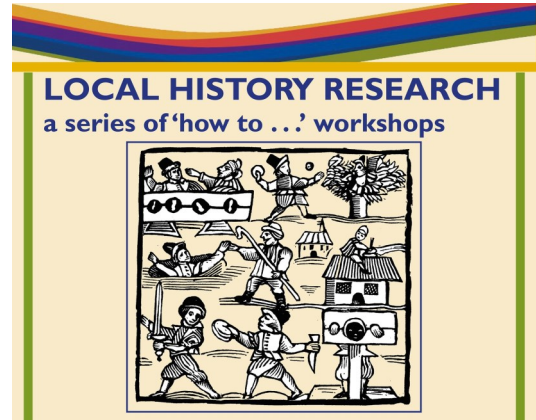
Here we have a picture of a mixed farm in the middle of the 16th century. The team of eight oxen worked hard on the heavy London clay of this manor, while the cows and pigs had rights of pasture and 'pannage' in the adjacent woods, commons and Clarendon Park. Medieval arable farmers usually kept some sheep to manure their land and maintain the fertility of the soil, but these large numbers point to the more important market for wool in nearby Salisbury. The chickens and geese remind us that, although this manor was next to one of the largest commercial centres in Tudor England, domestic produce still made up most of the diet of the residents.

*Mark Forrest*



The rent was £21

## Local History Workshops at the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Chippenham



Last winter, 2022-3, The VCH researchers working in Gloucestershire and Wiltshire teamed up with some of their counterparts elsewhere and with the University of the West of England to run a series of 'how to...' workshops on local history research, which were held in Gloucestershire's Heritage Hub (the equivalent of Wiltshire and Swindon's History Centre). It was so successful and it received such good feedback that they are running it there again through this winter. Not only that, but now there are plans to repeat it in Chippenham at the history centre fortnightly on alternate Monday mornings, beginning on the 7th October next year and running through to March 2025.

The course will cover the sources and techniques for local history study, sessions on landscape and building history, reading old handwriting and working with documents, as well as the main themes covered in VCH parish histories, such as ownership, government, transport, social history, working lives and the influence of religion.

As a rule there will be two lectures for each workshop, which will run from 9.30 until 13.00, with a thirty-minute refreshment break half way through. There will be a modest charge to attend each workshop.

Watch out for further information next year as we prepare the syllabus and produce publicity literature.

*John Chandler*

## Online Talks - Autumn 2023

The last two on-line talks of 2023 were well worth the wait.

On the 6th September, in unusually hot weather for the date, VCH contributing author Dr Mark Forrest spoke on the topic of Wiltshire manors and manorial documents, concentrating on those after 1500, as they are mostly written on paper in English and so more accessible than medieval documents.

The landholding of a manor was designed to support the Lord, his family and retainers in a pre-market economy. It would most likely include sheep grazing land, open fields, pasture, orchards, woodland and a settlement with the manor at the centre.

In Wiltshire most manors were relatively small, usually 3 or 4 to a parish. They could be owned by a Lord and his family or a school, college or church. For example, Mere Parsonage Manor was owned by the Dean and Chapter of Salisbury Cathedral. On the other hand not all manor houses were 'manors'. The title could be used to add status and make the house more saleable, as at Bullidge Manor (Bolehyde) near Chippenham, the former home of the Parker Bowles family, which is not really a manor at all.

In the Manor Courts, or Courts Baron, which every manor had the right to hold, together with the Courts Leet, we have the origins of our modern court system. The Court Baron dealt with such things as the transfer of tenancies, repair of roads and hedges and the election of estate officers. The Court Leet was the 'jury of the King' and dealt with such things as the election of royal officers and proclamations of Parliament.

Despite changes in the 18th and 19th centuries introducing highway boards, Crown Courts, local government etc., in 1888 some Manors were still making decisions. For example, in Monkton, Chippenham in 1887 the Lord of the Manor dealt with the lack of a common pound for cattle, trees to add privacy to a bathing area and a chain across a dipping place.

Mark finished by saying how lucky we are in Wiltshire that these documents are mostly held at the History Centre in Chippenham, some in national libraries and small amounts in private archives and so are accessible for historians.

The final talk of 2023 was on the 8th November by another of our authors, Dr Louise Ryland-Epton, who spoke about Francis Kilvert, the clergyman and diarist, who had close connections with Langley Burrell, near Chippenham.

Kilvert wrote many diaries during his lifetime, but unfortunately most of them were destroyed by his wife after his death and only those from 1870-79 survive. (I wonder what they said about her?)

Kilvert recorded all life, from the morose squire to children's conversations, with empathy and affection and they are a valuable primary resource for local historians. He recorded what was pertinent to him, but often left names out or used more than one name for places.

His father, Robert Kilvert, was the rector of St Peter's Church at Langley Burrell and in 1872 Francis became his curate. So he was out and about in the village and met many of its residents. His diaries are full of beautiful language. He talks of 'rich golden light', 'thick waving fragrant grass' and 'white sleeved mowers'. He also loved an anecdote, writing about escaped pigs and when he 'saw' a ghost.

The diaries also provide a social record. Kilvert reminisces about older people in the village, who were poor and planted produce in every part of the garden so that there was no room for flowers. When Old Dame Matthews saw out of the window that a farm hand stole a pound of butter and put it under his hat, she ordered some heated ale for him and made him sit by the fire until the melting butter ran down his face. An amusing story, but the man was poor and he got his comeuppance for stealing.

Kilvert's diaries are indeed, as Louise said, 'magical'. I wonder what we would have learned if more had survived.



Monkton House, Monkton Park, Chippenham  
Formerly Monkton Manor, remodelled in Georgian times and  
now converted into flats

## The 2024 series of On-line Talks

### **The Story of Clouds House: From a Palace of Art to a Home for Waifs and Strays**

A talk by Caroline Dakers. Clouds House near East Knoyle, designed by Philip Webb for the Hon. Percy and Madeline Wyndham and completed in 1886, was described as 'the house of the age'. Professor Dakers will outline the commission of Clouds and the relationship between Webb and his clients; the Wyndhams' taste for Morris and Co., and the work of D.G.Rosetti, G.F.Watts, Frederic Leighton and John Singer Sargent. She will follow the story of the house through the First World War in which the Wyndhams lost 5 grandsons; the sale of the house and the estate in the 1930s; the reduction in size from 30 bedrooms to 10 and its subsequent use as a home for 'waifs and strays'.

The talk takes place on Wednesday 24th April at 7.30pm.

### **Recent Research on Clarendon Park**

A talk by Rosalind Johnson. Clarendon Park in south-east Wiltshire, is a former royal estate, esteemed by medieval kings for deer-hunting. The magnificent Clarendon Palace, now a ruin, was the setting for feasting and entertainment, but also for conducting serious matters of state. In the 17th century Clarendon Park passed out of royal hands and became a private country estate. This talk will discuss the latest research on Clarendon Park and the palace in the context of previous histories of the estate.

The talk takes place on Wednesday 26th June at 7.30pm.

### **Wiltshire Sport and Recreation**

A talk by Ally McConnell. This talk will take us on a journey through recreational pursuits in Wiltshire through the centuries, as represented in the Wiltshire and Swindon Archives, from the sports clubs and societies to school sports and hunting and shooting. We hear also about when it can all go wrong, using examples from the depositions and coroners' bills.

This talk takes place on Wednesday 25th September at 7.30pm.

### **Murder by Witchcraft**

A talk by Louise Ryland-Epton. The year 1564 was a tumultuous one for the wealthy and connected Bayntun family of North Wiltshire. It started with the death of the head of the family, Sir Andrew Bayntun, owner of the manor of Stanley. Disaster then struck just before Easter when the infant, William Bayntun, new heir to the family fortune, died in suspicious circumstances. Soon after a Stanley widow, Agnes Mylles, was accused and confessed to killing the child by witchcraft. Implicated by a witchfinder and tried under new witchcraft legislation, she was hanged.

This talk looks at the events surrounding the death of William and its aftermath. We will uncover a tragic chain of events involving a family at war and the murky politics of the Tudor Court. Surprisingly, despite circumstances leading to one of the earliest witchcraft trials, the story has largely been overlooked by historians.

This talk takes place on Wednesday 23rd October at 7.30pm.

### **The Country House Gate Lodge**

A talk by James Holden. Country houses are often hidden from view at the centre of their estates and it is the gate lodge by the public road which announces their presence. So the gate lodge stands in for the house and in its architecture provides an advertisement for the taste of the owner. The result is a set of small buildings with big architectural pretensions, from the serious to the entirely fanciful, giving a fascinating insight into the taste of the last 200 years. James Holden's talk will trace this story, plentifully illustrated with examples from Wiltshire, a county which contains some of the finest gate lodges in the country.

This talk takes place on Wednesday 27th November at 7.30pm.

**Booking Details are to follow for all these talks  
and in the mean time**

**we would like to wish all our Friends and  
supporters**

**A very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!**



## Forthcoming Events



### Dates for your Diary – 2024 season of online talks



#### The Story of Clouds House: from a Palace of Art to a Home for Waifs and Strays

By Caroline Dakers – Wednesday 24th April

#### Recent Research on Clarendon Park

By Rosalind Johnson – Wednesday 26th June

#### Wiltshire Sport and Recreation

By Ally McConnell – Wednesday 25th September

#### Murder By Witchcraft

By Louise Ryland-Epton – Wednesday 23rd October

#### The Country House Gate Lodge

By James Holden – Wednesday 27th November

All the talks take place on-line and are kindly hosted again this year by the Wiltshire Museum, Devizes.

The cost is £10 per screen.

<https://www.wiltshirehistory.org>

**Booking links will be published shortly on our website and that of the Wiltshire Museum, Devizes**

Please help Wiltshire Victoria County History Trust by signing up to support us for FREE on #easyfundraising. You can raise donations whenever you shop online with over 7,000 brands including John Lewis & Partners, eBay, Argos, M&S and more. Plus, once you've raised your first £5, easyfundraising will double it!

Sign up today - it will make a BIG difference to us this year:

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

**Over £600 raised so far. Please help us raise even more.**

If you are reading this Newsletter and would like to make either a one-off or regular donation please contact our Hon. Treasurer,

Tean Dallaway, at [wiltshirevch@gmail.com](mailto:wiltshirevch@gmail.com)

Subscription rates are a minimum £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

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 website: <https://www.wiltshirehistory.org>  
[gilalder55@gmail.com](mailto:gilalder55@gmail.com)