



# 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 20, September, 2022

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



Sarah Rose Troughton, Patron



David Moss, Chairman, and Michael Wade

## Summer Event in The Close, Salisbury

On June 16th this year Michael Wade, our President, was kind enough to host the WVCH summer garden party at his home The Walton Canony, which has previously been lived in by the artist Rex Whistler and the novelist Leslie Thomas and dates, in its present form, from 1719. It was a beautifully warm evening in an idyllic setting with grounds reaching down to the River Avon and views over the Town Path and water meadows towards Harnham.

The Lord Lieutenant and Patron of the Wiltshire Victoria County History Trust, Sarah Rose Troughton, welcomed old friends and supporters and our Chairman, David Moss, outlined progress on the Red Books. Michael Wade spoke about how he first encountered the VCH volumes and read out an extract about The Walton Canony.

Our summer event is a vital part of our calendar each year, both as a unique chance to visit a garden that is not normally open to the public and also a major part of our annual fundraising efforts.

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Visitors in The Walton Canony gardens



Unusual view of the Cathedral

Dear Supporter,

We are deeply saddened by the death of Queen Elizabeth II. She graciously accepted rededication of the Victoria County History to the monarch during a visit to Salisbury in her Diamond Jubilee year, 2012, and we are deeply grateful for her support.

Our thoughts are with the Royal Family at this time.

Best wishes,

David Moss

Chairman Wiltshire VCH Trust

### Hidden History of Salisbury Walk

This walk, on the 23rd March, had been rescheduled from the autumn. Starting from Fish Row, David Richards led us around the city centre pointing out buildings illustrating the varied history of Salisbury, from some of the oldest - John Aport's timber framed house (1470s) and William Russell's House (1306) - to more recent additions, such as the Georgian Guildhall and, in front of it, the 20th century war memorial. The war memorial is of national importance because of its unique horizontal design, with all the names of the dead appearing on the front. The bronze casting was done at the Martins factory, famous for producing the Speaker's chair in the House of Commons and the Gloster Meteor jet.

Stopping at St Thomas' church, David explained the recently renovated and impressive Doom Painting, which was originally meant to be educational and full of church doctrine, with the judgmental Christ at the top.



Walk leader David Richards explains the Doom Painting in St Thomas's Church

Leaving the church, we walked along the High Street, through the High Street Gate and into the Cathedral Close, with its Barbara Hepworth 'Walking Madonna' and our attention was drawn to the west front of the cathedral niches filled with statues of the saints, which are Victorian replicas of the originals.

### Walking Tour of Stratford-sub-Castle

In April our second rescheduled walk started at St Lawrence church in Stratford-sub-Castle, where David Richards pointed out a stone recording Thomas Pitt as a benefactor.

The Pitt Family, especially Thomas 'Diamond' Pitt lived in Stratford for many years. Thomas gained his nickname through trading diamonds in the 18th century and as we walked towards Old Sarum, David pointed out the Pitt family home, Mawarden Court, the impressive one time vicarage.

Old Sarum was famously a 'rotten borough' as there were no actual residents, but landowners voted for the two MPs under an elm tree, the Parliament Tree. The Pitt family were MPs there, beginning with Thomas who bought the borough in 1691, and most famously by William Pitt the Elder, who became Prime Minister in 1766.

David ended the walk by pointing out the original site of the Parliament Tree and a sarsen stone which commemorates the story. He then brought things right up to date by telling us about the full size Spitfire replica, which was installed next to Old Sarum in recognition of the 'Secret Spitfires' built in Salisbury during WW2.



Walkers leaving St Lawrence Church, Stratford-sub-Castle, with its one-handed clock.



St Mary Street, Chippenham, showing the supposed curved line of the Saxon boundary.

### King Alfred and the origins of Chippenham

This was another in our series of highly successful Zoom talks attracting around 50 listeners.

Mike Stone, who is well known in Chippenham as an archaeologist and former curator of the museum, spoke of the many excavations that have taken place in Chippenham in search of its Saxon origins and traces of King Alfred's palace.

According to Asser's *Life of King Alfred* written in 893, King Alfred's sister was married at Chippenham and Alfred saw it as a place of relaxation. Also comparisons of the area with known Saxon sites make a Saxon settlement highly likely. But, although there have been Roman finds, a Saxon rubbish pit in Chapel Lane and pottery finds near St Andrew's Church, we are no closer to knowing where Alfred's hunting lodge was.

Mike followed his very interesting talk with a walk around Chippenham a few days later. This was very useful in placing the archaeological excavations and linking them to other evidence, such as the geography of the river area.

### Wiltshire's nonconformist chapels—a fine architectural heritage

Our second summer Zoom talk was given by James Holden, who is a Trustee of WVCH and is the Chairman of our Project Group, which oversees the research for the Red Books.

James has recently published a book with the Wiltshire Buildings Record about the nonconformist chapels of the county.

James outlined the history of nonconformists in the County since 1660 and illustrated this with photographs of remaining chapels, such as Monks Lane in

Corsham and Horningsham Congregational near Long-leat. Drawing our attention to the common features of galleries and double staircased pulpits and more unusual items, such as the placing of hat pegs which showed that men and women sat in separate areas of the chapels.

James' book 'Wiltshire Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting Houses' is available from The Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Cocklebury Road, Chippenham



Monks Hill Chapel, Corsham with its distinctive eyebrow window

### Book on Bremhill Parish

The book on the history of Bremhill Parish, entitled *Bremhill Parish Through the Ages: The Heritage of a Wiltshire Community* by Louise Ryland-Epton, which was published last year and was a joint venture between the Bremhill Parish History Group and WVCH, has jointly won the Alan Ball Local History Book of the Year 2021. This is a prestigious prize and is recognition of the contributions of all those who took part in this community history project over two years. The other winner was a book on Great Yarmouth.

The Bremhill Parish website - [bremhillparishhistory.com](http://bremhillparishhistory.com) has details of how to obtain a copy.

### Booking Links for Online Talks

John Leland: a Tudor traveller in Wiltshire

<https://www.wiltshiremuseum.org.uk/?event=online-talk-john-leland-a-tudor-traveller-in-wiltshire>

Wiltshire Constituencies and the 1832 Reform Act

[https://www.wiltshiremuseum.org.uk/?event=online-talk-wiltshire-constituencies-and-the-1832-reform-act&event\\_date=2022-11-23](https://www.wiltshiremuseum.org.uk/?event=online-talk-wiltshire-constituencies-and-the-1832-reform-act&event_date=2022-11-23)



## Forthcoming Events

### Online Talk—John Leland: a Tudor traveller in Wiltshire

A talk by John Chandler

Wednesday 5th October at 7.30pm, £10 per screen

John Leland was one of the leading scholars of his day—polymath, courtier of King Henry VIII, biographer, bibliographer, historian and inveterate explorer. The first to envisage an encyclopaedic account of Britain based on his own fieldwork, he became insane before realizing his ambition, but he left us his notes—the earliest eyewitness descriptions of our towns and villages. (Booking link on p3)

### Online Talk—Wiltshire Constituencies and the 1832 Reform Act

A talk by Michael Hodges

Wednesday 23rd November at 7.30pm, £10 per screen

In addition to the two county seats, sixteen boroughs in Wiltshire each sent two MPs up to Westminster, in all about 5% of the total. These ranged from the very rotten Old Sarum through pocket boroughs such as Calne and Downton, to more respectable boroughs such as Devizes and Salisbury. A look at some of the individuals who sat for these seats and a brief look at how the Great Reform Act of 1832 was eventually passed. (Booking link on p3)

Both these talks are kindly hosted by the Wiltshire Museum and can be booked via their Website (click on Events)

## 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**.

If you haven't signed up yet, it's easy and completely free. 6,100 shops and sites will donate to us when you use Easyfundraising to do your everyday online shopping—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](http://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/causes/wvcht/>

If you are reading this Newsletter but you are not yet a Friend of WVCH please contact our Hon. Treasurer, Tean Dallaway, at [wiltshirevch@gmail.com](mailto: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](mailto:gilalder55@gmail.com)