

Issue 1 July 2014

Welcome from the Editor

Welcome to the first **Academy News**, the new-style newsletter of the Gloucestershire County History Trust. We plan to produce the newsletter every six months to keep our subscribers, volunteers and supporters informed about the good progress we are now making in completing the history of all the parishes in Gloucestershire for the Victoria County History (VCH) project. This started as long ago as the reign of Queen Victoria and somewhere over half the historic (pre-1974) county of Gloucestershire has been covered, but it is taking a long time! Since the Trust was launched in 2010, when public funding was withdrawn, we have raised funds to award contracts to a number of professional historians and this first newsletter appears at an exciting time as their researches are beginning to appear on our website (see last page). In this newsletter you will find news from the Trust, then updates on progress from our contracted historians and finally articles on subjects which our researchers found particularly interesting, but for which no space will be found in the forthcoming Big Red Books.

My thanks go to all the contributors to the newsletter and especially to John Chandler, our county editor, for the production, and to Jonathan Comber, the Trust's treasurer, who has collated the various contributions for me. We hope you enjoy reading what follows. If you have any comments or further ideas please let me know: dhaldred@btinternet.com.

David Aldred
Editor



*Our contracted historians:
Antonia Catchpole, Rose Wallis, John Chandler, Beth Hartland, Alex Craven (photo James Hodsdon)*

Welcome from the Trust

After the long build-up of fundraising (not over yet!) it has been very heartening to see the burgeoning amount of actual research now under way. The money is now being spent, and we're delighted to have a whole five editors engaged – more than at any time in VCH Gloucestershire history, we think. Separate reports from the editors appear elsewhere, but perhaps the main thing is that the VCH central office, who take care of actual publication of the Big Red Books, have Volume XIII (Vale of Gloucester parishes) definitely in their schedule for 2015. We still have one parish to research, and then maps and illustrations to consider, but we're getting close to realising the first big target set when the Trust was formed in 2010. We haven't seriously begun planning any launch event yet,

A biannual newsletter for everyone involved in, or interested in, the progress of the Victoria County History towards its completion in Gloucestershire. The VCH Gloucestershire Academy is the name given to the editors and volunteers who work together researching and writing under the aegis of the Gloucestershire County History Trust. The Trust and the Academy are based at Gloucestershire Archives, Clarence Row, Alvin Street, Gloucester GL1 3DW

but the publication of Volume XIII will be a big milestone for us all, and worth making a fuss about.

The Trustees are keen to sustain the pace of work on all three of the next projects, based around Yate, Cirencester and Cheltenham. Broadly speaking there is enough money now in the bank to keep active in all three areas for a couple of years, but the corollary of that is that if we are to maintain the current pace, we have to work hard over the next year or so to replenish the coffers. We have a number of ideas for achieving this, but all will take persistence and effort to get the required results.

We remain immensely grateful to the Winstone Charitable Trust for their long-term support of our Cirencester work, to the Summerfield Charitable Trust for kick-starting the Cheltenham fund, and to the estate of Prof and Mrs FF Bonsall, for a very large donation which made a transformational difference to our Cheltenham plans. We have a continuing debt of gratitude to the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, who supported the Volume XIII work in our early days, and have generously committed to further help with the Yate volume. Also very significant, not least because of the message it sends to the rest of the county, is the support we have had from the Honourable Company of Gloucestershire. John Chandler and Rose Wallis had the honour of addressing their AGM last November, and this has led to the Honourable Company very kindly sponsoring a talk at the next Cheltenham Literature Festival on Wednesday 8 October that should appeal to VCH supporters. David Vaisey, the Gloucestershire-born former Bodley's Librarian will speak on 'Gloucestershire History: A view from the Bodleian'. David, who was also formerly associated with the VCH Oxfordshire Trust, will reflect on the links between the 400-year-old library and the history of Gloucestershire, and how they provide evidence for current work on the history of the county. His session will be introduced by John Chandler. For more details visit www.cheltenhamfestivals.com/literature.

Support in kind is equally important, so it's a pleasure to acknowledge the increasing (and increasingly well-organised) contribution being made by volunteers. The main vehicle for this is John Chandler's VCH Gloucestershire Academy (see below). 'Amateur' help was

not always welcome at the VCH in the past, but it has been really impressive to see how our current editors have been able to draw on the strengths of our numerous volunteers, and guide them where necessary.

In other news: VCH Gloucestershire now has one of the six 'county' seats on the re-formed Victoria County History Advisory Board, a national committee, meeting twice-yearly in London. Sir Nicholas Mander, who has led the Trust since our start in 2010, providing valuable leads and contacts, stepped down as Chairman this spring. Jonathan Comber – possibly unique in being a volunteer with VCHs in three counties – has joined the Trustees as the new Hon. Treasurer, bringing more professional skills to the role than I could ever claim.

We do thank all our supporters, and would always welcome more !

James Hodson, Chairman, GCHT

Editor's note: *James fails to mention that the Trust's current healthy financial situation is almost entirely due to his hard work and enthusiasm as the Hon. Treasurer. Thank you James.*

Latest on the Volumes

Volume XIII (Severn Vale parishes)

Volume XIII, which was left half-written when John Jurica and Simon Draper finished in 2010, will consist of thirteen rural parish histories in three blocks. Most lie north-west of Gloucester beside the Severn and Leadon rivers, but two – Minsterworth and Elmore – are on opposite banks of the Severn below Gloucester, and one, Twyning, lies north of Tewkesbury between the Severn and Avon. Of the six places still to be done in 2010, Simon has written Sandhurst and I have completed Ashleworth, Maisemore and Hartpury, with Norton nearly done. I still have to tackle Twyning and am just beginning to explore the sources and the parish, which feels much more Midlands and Worcestershire than the settlements around Gloucester. I aim to have the texts finished in draft during the summer, ready to



Medieval Cheltenham and Cirencester

submit to central office for editing. I still have to gather illustrations, draft maps and write the introduction, and then there will be the various production stages, including the index, to work through. But everything seems to be taking shape, and we hope to be on target to publish next year. All the draft texts, apart from Norton and Twyning, are posted on the VCH Gloucestershire website for comment, which they do attract from time to time, so please take a look at them.

Progress on other volumes

Volume XIV (Yate and District) is under the direction of editor Rose Wallis. Work is initially concentrating on the history of Yate, where the accounts of the settlement, manors and estates, and economic history have already been loaded on to the VCH Gloucestershire website. Rose has completed drafts of the religious and social history sections. This leaves just local government history which is currently close to completion. Once this is drafted, and all sections have been edited, it is hoped to publish Yate separately in the VCH paperback series of 'shorts'. Volume XIV will eventually cover all the ancient parishes of Lower Grumbald's Ash Hundred. These are: Acton Turville, Chipping Sodbury, Dodington, Little Sodbury, Old Sodbury, Tormarton, Wapley with Codrington and West Littleton. Volunteers have been researching information to produce parish profiles of these parishes, which again will be mounted on the our VCH website in due course.

Work on Volume XV (Cheltenham and district) has started with editors Beth Hartland and Alex Craven researching the medieval and early modern periods respectively. For more details on their progress see their articles below. A number of volunteers, co-ordinated by Sally Self, are researching particular topics, including charities, population, Roman Catholicism, economic history and education, including the Ladies' College.

Work on Volume XVI (Cirencester and district) has also started with editors Beth Hartland and Antonia Catchpole working on the medieval and early modern periods respectively. Research is being undertaken on education, local government, estates and building history by various volunteers, assisted by Linda Viner.

John Chandler

I joined VCH Gloucestershire in October 2013, having been contracted to research Cheltenham and Cirencester for the period 400-1540. The tasks still to do are to complete the library work and consult the remaining primary sources. My aim is to begin writing the medieval Cheltenham and Cirencester sections in the autumn.

The main sources for Cheltenham have been an impressive run of accounts held at The National Archives, Kew, along with a number of rentals and court rolls, all of which are not well-known locally. Although not an unbroken series, these accounts run from 1344 to 1536 (covering 102 of these years), the rentals are twelve in number, and the manor court rolls cover the periods 1332-4, 1398-1400, 1407-8, 1494-5, 1515-17, 1520-2 and 1527-30. I have been helped by the Cheltenham Latin Group in working through these sources. Due to the kindness of the archivist, Elizabeth Lomas, I have been allowed to see most of the court rolls held by the Duchy of Cornwall, although these require conservation. They cover 1313-14, 1330-3, 1373-4, 1377-8, 1400-1, 1405-6, 1423-4, 1471-3, 1489-91. The earliest court roll (1275-1280) has yet to be seen because it requires conservation. Hopefully this conservation will occur before the end of this year as Cheltenham Arts Council has kindly given a grant of £200 towards the cost of its conservation.

Manorial accounts are generally rather dry and dusty in terms of content. They do not abound with human interest stories. Nevertheless, glimpses of the lives which generated the manorial income can be seen. In the fifteenth century, for example, we find evidence of various disputes between the lord of the manor and his customary tenants over the value of their work on his land, or demesne. An extent of Cheltenham manor made in 1294 noted that there were seventy customary tenants, who owed the lord services of ploughing, weeding, mowing, binding and turning hay, carting and gathering corn on his demesne. The next view



Early Modern Cheltenham

is in 1344/5 when we see that some of these tenants are selling their works to the lord of the manor: in total, six days of ploughing, eighteen harrowings and eighteen hoeings were sold. These works were greatly resented by those who had to perform them without payment, because they really wanted to be working on their own lands and not the lord's.

Following the demographic and social upheavals after the Black Death in 1348/9 and subsequent outbreaks, the demesne was rented out on many manors. In Cheltenham, this led to the works being rented out: a payment of 'worksilver' being made in lieu of the performance of the works owed by customary tenants. For many years the worksilver was charged at £10 os. 6³/₄d. But c.1450–3 a major dispute took place between the lord of the manor (the abbey and convent of Syon, near London) and the customary tenants. Negotiations took place over several years, with teams of negotiators sent to Cheltenham on behalf of the abbey, before the abbess of Syon agreed to reduce the worksilver to £6 13s. 4d. in the face of the opposition of various 'wilful steeves' who were withholding their contributions. This coming to terms no doubt encouraged other tenants to try their hand at withholding payment; from 1462 other tenants were refusing to pay, and the worksilver had to be renegotiated again, the level dropping to £6.

The main source for Cirencester has been the Cirencester Cartulary, published in two volumes. The original manuscript is held at the Bodleian Library, Oxford and comprises two volumes written on high quality vellum. Register A, compiled after 1249, and Register B, compiled after 1360, are volumes containing the abbey copies of important documents relating to its foundation, privileges, legal rights and title deeds. Recent news is that the facsimile of Register B, used by the editor to produce the edition of the cartulary, has now found a home in Gloucestershire Archives. Aside from the cartulary, much information has been extracted from the long list of usual parish VCH sources. Two other main Cirencester sources remain to be consulted – a number of wills held at Worcester and the Register of the Lady Chapel, again held in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Beth Hartland

The first newsletter is a useful opportunity for me to introduce myself to anybody who has not yet met me. I am now four months into a one-year contract, with the task of writing the history of Cheltenham between 1540 and 1740. Before joining VCH Gloucestershire, I spent six years working for VCH Wiltshire, where I wrote the histories of several parishes in the south-west of the county. My task in Gloucestershire is to pick up the tale of Cheltenham's history at the time of the Reformation and to carry it forward to the point that the spa was discovered.

The VCH has a very particular way of working, beginning with a list of standard sources and then expanding to include more particular sources related to each location. Our work often begins with analysis of any early maps which survive. With Cheltenham this is especially important, because the modern town bears little relation to how it would have appeared for much of its existence. The map which accompanies Cheltenham's inclosure award of 1806 was produced less than a generation after the visit of George III in 1788 which had thrust the spa into the national gaze. It recorded Cheltenham just at the beginning of its metamorphosis into the town we know today. Although this map dates from after the period I am researching, it shows us much of the historic landscape which now lies hidden under later development, and so is essential for understanding the earlier history of the town. Besides these, there are several seventeenth-century surveys of the area known as Cheltenham Hundred, detailing who occupied each individual plot of land within the town and its surrounding area.

From these and others sources, a picture of early modern Cheltenham is beginning to emerge, of a quiet market town strung along the length of the High Street, on a route connecting Oxford with Gloucester and Tewkesbury. Analysis by Sally Self of occupations in Cheltenham in the first decade of James I's reign (1603–25) reveals the preponderance of rural trades that one might expect, but also men involved in the cloth trade or brewing. In



1682, a visitor to the annual St James' fair described an 'abundance of horses for the cart and other drudging uses, but few for the saddle. Hither also do come some carts laden with fine white salt from the wiches or salt pits to sell, and country wenches have stockings hanging on their arms to such as will buy them.' During the middle forty years of the seventeenth century, Cheltenham was at the heart of a flourishing domestic tobacco industry. Defying local law officers and central government alike, the struggle to supplant the Virginian monopoly was nevertheless doomed to failure.

Other sources enable us to learn more about the individuals who lived within the town. Legal cases brought before the courts in London suggest that these were more violent times, with large groups of armed men willing to square up to each other to dispute the ownership of a particular field or even of a tree. The scattering of wills and inventories which have survived from this period gives us a sense of the prosperity of some of these men and women, recording not only property left behind but also sometimes revealing the size of their homes. Wills also give us an insight into religious opinions at the time, and show that Cheltenham was not sheltered from the religious controversies of the Reformation. In 1544 and 1545, Cheltenham women left money to pay for priests to pray for each of them for several months in the parish church, a practice consistent with traditional Roman Catholic teaching, yet one of their neighbours felt emboldened enough to make a clear profession of Protestant faith as part of his final testament. There are other echoes of religious discord in the town.

Cheltenham's manor court registered the transfer of property, recorded local customs and by-laws, and regulated the town's inhabitants. During the restoration of Roman Catholicism under Mary I, one local man was presented at the court for refusing to receive communion or to be confessed. Another, a tailor from Westal called John Cobberley, made the ultimate sacrifice for his faith, when he was burned for his 'diverse heresies and false opinions' at

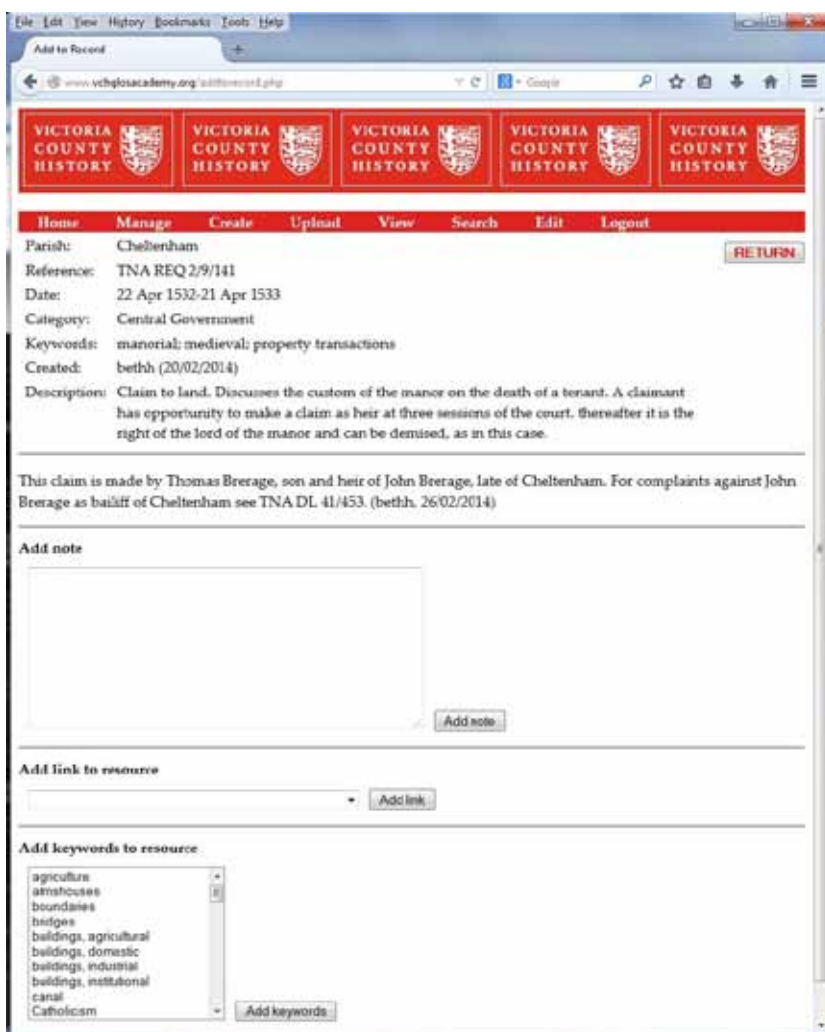
Salisbury in 1555.

It is these stories of the ordinary and extraordinary individuals that inhabited Cheltenham in the past that I hope to bring to you in future editions of the newsletter.

Alex Craven

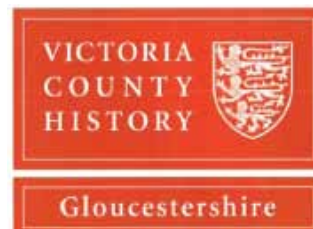
The VCH Gloucestershire Academy Website

In collaborative research projects the co-ordination required to ensure that all the



A website record for a document in The National Archives at Kew. One note has already been added to the original description (separated on the screen by horizontal lines). Another researcher could add a further note, a link to an image of the original or further keywords. (See discussion on page 6 overleaf)

necessary research is done without unnecessary duplication invariably represents a significant challenge. The VCH Gloucestershire



Academy website is intended to harness the power of technology to address that challenge by providing editors and volunteers with a space for recording and sharing information. At its core is the database used by researchers to record notes on the sources they have read. Once uploaded to the website, these notes can be read by all members of the academy. Other researchers, who look at the same source, can add their own notes to the original record, so that all the information about a particular source is kept together. Researchers are encouraged to add keywords from an extensive pre-defined list to their notes, so that someone writing on a particular topic will be readily able to identify all the sources that have been identified as relevant. Researchers may also upload resources to the website, to make them accessible to others. Such resources currently include transcriptions and abstracts of documents and images of documents awaiting transcription.

The first phase of the database has now been in operation for several months. Further development will take place in the light of experience and a growing awareness of the extent of the data that will be collected. In particular I have identified that the management of uploaded resources needs to be more sophisticated than at present.

Jan Broadway

Editor's note: *The Academy was set up in 2013 to enable our contracted historians and volunteers to meet regularly to discuss progress and share ideas. It usually meets on the third Thursday of the month in the Frith Centre at Gloucestershire Archives. Please contact John if you would like to find out more - he is always delighted to welcome more volunteers. At the present time access to the Academy website is for members only. We are really grateful to Jan, our IT expert, for setting it up and maintaining it.*

Two Wayward Curates

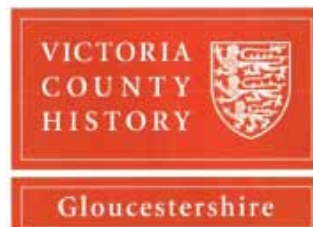
‘**A**lie can be halfway round the world before the truth has got its boots on.’ I was reminded of this oft-quoted and misquoted remark while working on my account of Norton, between Gloucester and Tewkesbury. Having drawn up and checked my list of perpetual curates I did a quick internet and

Ancestry search on each, in case any had distinguished himself in a noteworthy way. Most were pretty dull, but when I looked up Hugh Percy Rennett (curate 1836–43) I had a surprise.

Up popped the digitized *Southern Australian*, 21 July 1843, quoting the *Liverpool Mercury* of 24 February previously. Presumably a copy had voyaged halfway round the world and had just arrived in Adelaide. ‘On Saturday se’nnight [last week] the Rev Hugh Percy Rennett, curate of Norton, a relative of the Northumberland family, was shot with a pistol by his stepson, a youth of 18, for attempting to beat his mother, and now lies in a dangerous state.’ Naturally intrigued, I consulted the *Gloucester Journal*. The first report, on 18 February, was broadly sympathetic to the unfortunate gentleman (though it mentioned an unhappy domestic situation), but less so to the stepson and his mother, who were both being held in gaol charged with attempting and abetting murder.

Then the story hit the national press, and next week’s *Gloucester Journal*, 25 February, told a different and more detailed story about ‘the melancholy affray’. A tale unravelled of the curate’s persistent extreme violence to his household, his habitual drunkenness and an attempt at arson. The servants, it transpired, had fled in terror earlier in the day of the shooting, leaving the stepson, ‘a young man of consumptive tendency, and of general mildness of temper’ to protect his mother as best he could. The account ended by reporting that the curate was recovering from his injury, and: ‘We perceive that his effects (belongings) are offered for sale and it is understood that he is about to quit the neighbourhood.’ And that was true. His wife and stepson were acquitted, and the curate disappeared from history. He is not in the 1851 or 1861 census, but Hugh Percy Rennett did make one last curtain call. The *London Gazette* of 1 May 1868 records that he had died three months earlier, at the Grand Hotel de France et d’Angleterre, Paris, where he had been living; and the solicitor for his widow, who had letters of administration, placed a notice to creditors.

Most of this (and much more) will be



consigned to the VCH cutting room floor, but a sentence and a footnote will appear in print I hope, just in case anyone wishes to work up the story one day for the parish magazine.

I said that most were pretty dull, but one previous perpetual curate also turned out to be temporary. Thomas Wood, curate 1603–9, was removed from his living after a deposition in the church court (GDR 100, 646) suggested that he was spending rather too much time alone with one of his married parishioners, Ann Brawne. Wood was aggrieved by the verdict, and a further deposition, in 1610, goes into more detail (GDR 109, 137). One Richard Ockey called at the church while George Baldwin (Wood's successor) was inside teaching scholars, and told him that he thought Wood and Brawne were together in some secret place. Ockey and Baldwin then sat in the church porch watching the house opposite, whose occupant kept coming out and looking round. About an hour later (what were the scholars doing all this while?) Wood left the house and after he had gone Brawne came out and went off separately. Subsequently Wood bumped into Baldwin in Gloucester, and said that the bishop had wronged him by displacing him from his living, but that notwithstanding he would live in Norton to plague Baldwin and would revenge himself upon him and his successors. If and how he carried out these threats is not recorded.

John Chandler

Who'd be an Executor? – Extracts from Cirencester Wills

John Coxwell or Cockswell of Cirencester 1610 (TNA, PROB 11/137/370)

I also give Samuel my cup that is an egg shell of white silver, with a cover which was called Harry Coxwell's cup. I give to Samuel my goblet, one salt that hath a cover, and parcel gilt, 12 silver spoons with gilt knappes at the lesser end, 1 tankard parcel gilt, 1 silver bowl to drink beer, 1 beaker of silver, 2 bowls of silver to drink wine, 1 trencher salt whole gilt, 1 of the bowls all gilt ...

From the will of Robert Iles of Cirencester, yeoman 1649 (TNA, PROB 1/212/702)

To my daughter Martha my fourth best bed and bolster with appurtenances my fourth best brass pot and six of the fourth best pewter

From the will of Samuel Coxwell, 1625 (TNA, PROB 11/148/328)

And my special charge is to all my children is upon my blessing that they be obedient to their Mother and not wilful to make any rash match without the connsaile and consent of their Mother and uncle Robert Strange

From the will of Elizabeth Toll 1534 (TNA, PROB 11/25/212)

To twenty poor maidens of honest conversation £6 13s 4d That is to say to wit to each of them towards their marriage 6s 8d

From the will of John Phillipps, shoemaker 1612 (TNA, PROB 11/121/400)

To my overseers 4s to be divided between them. And if any difference should happen between my children I desire them to end it

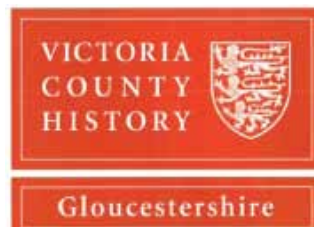
Alison Hobson

Cheltenham and an Oliver Cromwell Connection

While searching through the vast Dutton archive (Sherborne Muniments GA D678) I have come across several morsels to enliven an otherwise rather dull search through what seemed like mountains of title and family deeds: though to be fair several previously untapped pieces of information seem to have emerged. The Dutton family were lords of the manor of Cheltenham from 1628 to 1840 and it now seems likely that after the Civil War and Commonwealth (and possibly before that), the manor was let to various Cheltonians – certainly William Roberts, William Wills and Richard Cowle rented the manor from 1693 to 1707.

So what about the serendipitous moments? One was

coming across a striking portrait of Oliver Cromwell – can you spot the wart? (GA D678/1/F2/15 – Exemplification of a verdict concerning





Oliver Cromwell, from GA D678/1/F2/15 – Exemplification of a verdict concerning the Manor of Sherborne 1657

the Manor of Sherborne 1657). There was a strong link between John Dutton and Oliver, for in John's will, January 1655, he requests that Cromwell takes on the guardianship of his nephew William Dutton with 'the estate that I have left him', referring to Oliver as 'his Highnesse' and referring to 'the discourse that hath passed betwixt us' and referring to the possible marriage of William Dutton and Lady Frances Cromwell. (GA D678/1/F2/23). This of course may well have been naked flattery in an attempt to save his large estate from confiscation!

With such snippets as: 'July 1697 payments on the death of Richard Newland by a post falling', speculation can work overtime! Were they raising a new house? A slip as they were unloading a wagon? Who can now know?

Sally Self

The GWR Cirencester Branch, 1841 – 1965

Cirencester was briefly a western terminus of the Great Western Railway at the time the line opened from Swindon on 31 May 1841. This may have influenced the elaborate

style of the station building, which survives today. Four years later the town found itself on a branch line when the main line was extended to Gloucester and Cheltenham. The growth of the rail network and its traffic led to pressure to improve the station facilities at Cirencester and also Kemble, notably the rebuilding of Cirencester engine shed in 1872 and Kemble station was completely rebuilt and upgraded in 1882 when the Tetbury branch was built.

Cirencester's other railway, the Midland & South Western Junction, opened in 1883. It was conceived as a trunk route from Andover to link with the Midland Railway via the Banbury & Cheltenham (by now part of the GWR) at Andoversford. The Great Western may have missed an opportunity to link directly with the MSWJ line but its Tetbury branch was a tactical move to prevent westward expansion of its rival, the Midland Railway at Nailsworth. Possibly this defeat of a competitor's plans (and virtual closure of the Thames & Severn Canal) in the 1880s may have made the GWR complacent and unwilling to increase its services. The early twentieth century then saw a boom in rail traffic and the completion of the Cheltenham–Honeybourne line in 1908 enabled the GWR to promote day return travel from Cirencester to Cheltenham Racecourse, Stratford and Warwick.

Passenger traffic declined sharply from the mid 1920s to the mid 1930s because of the depression and road competition, although freight and parcel traffic held up remarkably well. Cirencester goods shed was rebuilt with longer loading bays in 1938. The GWR fought buses and coaches by promoting day and half day trips, although some of these involved multiple changes. Then the Second World War brought another boom in passenger numbers, largely because of petrol rationing. Passenger traffic was beginning to reduce again by the time of Nationalisation in 1948 and the decline was accelerated by the ending of petrol rationing in 1950. Freight on the branch remained sufficiently heavy to justify two trains each weekday from Cirencester Town, with several passenger trains also conveying wagons as required. Rebuilding of the station in 1956 was halted in what can best be described as a public relations own goal. The Government had approved a



Modernisation Plan for B.R. in 1955 but the future of rural branch lines remained unclear, with some closing.

In a further twist of fate, the Cirencester and Tetbury branch lines were chosen for an experiment arising from the Modernisation Plan. Four diesel railbuses built by A.C. Cars and weighing only 11 tons were based at Swindon to work the two branches from February 1959. As they were equipped with retractable steps, they could serve cheaply built halts with platforms at rail level. One such halt opened at Chesterton Lane with the start of railbus operation and another followed at Park Leaze, near Ewen, in 1960. But were railbuses the right way to develop passenger traffic? Their capacity was small and their introduction only scratched the surface of the economics of rail operation. Arguably they were a low cost solution to B.R.'s chronic difficulties in retaining staff for grimy, labour intensive work at a time when better paid work with more congenial hours was abundant.

The timing of the railbus experiment was politically unlucky. Within a year of the start of railbus services, the Government had set up the Stedeford Committee to examine the future role of Britain's railways in the light of their mounting financial deficits. Its members included Richard Beeching, who became Chairman of B.R. in 1961 with a remit to reduce B.R.'s deficit as rapidly as possible without making significant investment. His 1963 Report, *The Reshaping of British Railways*, recommended closing 5,000 route miles (including the Cirencester and Tetbury branches) and over 2,000 stations.



One of the railbuses arrives in Cirencester from Kemble on 12 September 1963. The photograph clearly shows the 1938 goods shed. (David Aldred)

The General Election of October 1959 had given Cirencester a new MP, Nicholas Ridley. He had probably not seen the launch of the railbuses eight months previously and was an ambitious politician who would openly support the Beeching proposals. Later still he would become Transport Secretary in Mrs. Thatcher's Government. Opponents of closure had a more difficult task when their own MP in a safe seat did not support them. The figures which claimed the line to be uneconomic were disputed but the then Transport Minister, Ernest Marples, seems to have had little hesitation in approving closure. The Cirencester branch closed to passengers (and the Tetbury branch completely) from 6 April 1964. Freight services to Cirencester Town continued until 4 October 1965.

The railbuses were redeployed to Bodmin and Yeovil before ending their working days in Scotland. Cirencester Town station building has defied two attempts to demolish it, although it lost its platform canopy in 1973 and is currently empty. Two of the A.C. Cars railbuses have been preserved, although the one now at the Colne Valley Railway was in poor external condition in 2013.

Nigel Bray

Herbert Norris (1859–1931), Antiquary, Collector and Benefactor: a Huntingdon- shire man in Cirencester

Early life

A fruitful email exchange with David Birkert of St Ives in Huntingdonshire (now part of administrative Cambridgeshire) brought forth an interesting connection between that town and Cirencester, which until now seems largely undocumented. It linked Herbert Norris's role as St Ives' museum's benefactor with his period as a resident and businessman in Cirencester, where he spent forty years of his life.

Herbert Ellis
Norris was born in St



Ives on 27 March 1859, the first child of Ellis Norris and his wife Hannah Munsey. Herbert attended Manchester House school, later the St Ives Grammar school. His early interests were in natural history, particularly butterflies, moths and birds' eggs and this extended to the history of St Ives and the whole county. He had other interests too. A poster advertises a lecture by Herbert on 'The Orbs of Heaven' illustrated with lantern slides in Somersham in 1883.

An obituary records that he began his career as a jeweller and silversmith with an uncle in Cambridge. This is almost certainly David Munsey (Herbert's mother's brother) who founded the jewellery business bearing that name in 1867 in Market Hill Cambridge. There is no evidence of Herbert serving an apprenticeship as a silversmith nor an assay mark in his name, so it seems likely that he was dealer in silver and jewellery, rather than a designer and maker.

Herbert was also interested in photography, advertising himself in 1886 as a photographer from a studio at Vine Cottage and there are many examples of his photographs of St Ives and elsewhere in the Norris Museum collection. He also began researching and writing a number of articles on St Ives, Wyton, Hemingford Grey and church bells of the county for the local paper. In 1888 the *Hunts County Guardian* published his book *History of St Ives*. His friend, Beresford Stevens, wrote after his death that 'these were essentially amateur efforts and in some cases unreliable but did represent pioneer work never attempted before'.

Move to Cirencester

By 1891, now aged 32, Herbert had moved to Cirencester where he was to settle for the rest of his life. Quite why he left Huntingdonshire for Gloucestershire is not known but he acquired the business of Mr J Seymour Tanner, jeweller and silversmith in the Market Place. Cirencester directories list him there from 1894 through to 1927 at

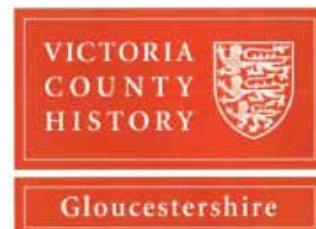


*Norris' shop at 15 Market Place, Cirencester c.1907
(photo courtesy The Norris Museum, St Ives, with thanks to Helen Giles, Curator)*

15 and 20 Dyer Street. When he is listed in the 1901 Census, his business as watchmaker, jeweller and gold silversmith at Number 15 was squeezed between Charles W. Smith, chemist at Number 14 and Joseph Matthews, tobacconist at Number 16.

It was here that Norris began collecting books, documents, prints, paintings, photographs and objects relating to Huntingdonshire. His library included anything referring to Huntingdonshire or printed in the county, whatever the subject, in fact it is reported that he could not understand why someone would want to buy a car when they could buy a medieval document for the same price! A photograph of Herbert's study shows the wall covered with drawings, watercolours and photographs by Huntingdonshire artists or of Huntingdonshire scenes and the table and cabinets full of his collection of papers. Beresford Stevens described the scene as a Huntingdonshire Museum in Gloucestershire.

Herbert was actively involved in Cirencester life. He was a founder member and president of both the local Chess Club (writing a guide to the *Records of the Cirencester Chess Club 1895-1911*) and the Cage Bird Society. He also joined the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society as well as continuing his research and writing. He was an advisor for the Victoria County History



of Huntingdonshire and his obituary noted that 'it may be said that he was recognised as the historian of his native county'.

Herbert obviously maintained contact with his home county, and he is listed as an original member of the Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire Archaeology Society (1902). Family events naturally called him back to St Ives; with his father's death in 1903 followed by his mother a year later, the family home Vine Cottage was sold under his direction in 1904. Towards the end of his life Herbert seemed to be planning to return to Huntingdonshire as he bought Ferrar House in Huntingdon but he died at his home in Cirencester on what would have been his 72nd birthday in 1931. A fulsome obituary in the *Standard* appeared under the heading of 'Antiquary and Collector'.

In his will, written twenty eight years earlier in 1903, Herbert Norris bequeathed his collections together with the bulk of his estate to St Ives Borough Council. The Council acted on his wishes and proceeds from the estate were used to buy the site of an old malting and the local architect Sidney Inskip Ladds was commissioned to design and build a museum and house. The 'Norris Library and Museum', the title carved in stone above the Museum door, was officially opened in September 1933. It still functions today (address: The Broadway, St Ives, Cambridgeshire, PE27 5NR) in the ownership of St Ives Town Council. See www.norrismuseum.org.uk.

David Viner

Abbreviated from *Cirencester Archaeological & Historical Society Newsletter*, no. 59, Spring 2014, pp 9-11 (reproduced with permission).

Men's doubles, Tudor style?

In October 1557, the constable of Cheltenham 'presented' (named in court) four local men for playing 'Tenys' - apparently the first mention of the game in the town. The feckless four included Edward Bartram, known from other references to be the miller of Cambray. A 1542 statute of Henry VIII had made tennis and other idle pursuits unlawful for any artificer, apprentice or labourer (except at Christmas or with his master's consent), but

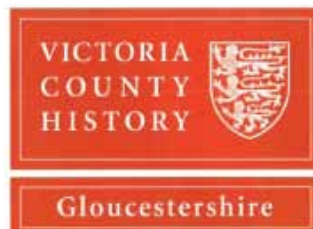
the miller wouldn't have fitted any of these categories and must have been caught under another act. Bartram and his chums were each fined 4d. The manor court record is silent as to where they played - one hopes at a safe distance from the millpond. [GA D855/M1]

James Hodsdon

The Use of Cirencester Council Minutes

There are forty six minute books of Cirencester Council covering the period from when the Cirencester Improvement Commissioners were set up by an Act of Parliament of 1825 until 1974 when the local government re-organisation of that year led to the creation of Cotswold District Council. As some of these minute books contain over six hundred pages, it can be seen that there is a huge amount of material to be examined! At the time of writing I have reached 1951. Although reading council minute books may sound fairly dry, it is an invaluable source for the history of the place being covered. It also helps a newcomer to the county like myself get a feeling for the history of Cirencester and the things that affected the town including the involvement of the Bathurst and Chester-Master families. The incorporation of Stratton into the area administered by the Urban District Council in 1935 following the Local Government Act of 1929 has meant that I am also recording developments here to assist in drafting an account of this parish in due course. The Academy database that has been set up allows me to record Stratton as a location for these entries which means the minute books will not need to be trawled again when work begins on this parish. The rest of this article will cover the types of information that can be gleaned from the minute books. There are many items of interest.

One key use of the minutes is to track the development of Cirencester because all planning applications have to be approved by the Council, so for example the development of the areas described in



the minutes as the London and Beeches Road housing estate and the Siddington Road area can be followed over a number of years. There were also buildings erected from about 1938 at the request of the Ministry of Air to house in Cirencester the service personnel working at the RAF Equipment unit at Kemble.

It is also possible to use the minutes as a way of checking on the accounts of charities and schools, for councillors in Cirencester were regularly appointed as representatives or managers to the Council school in Lewis Lane, Powell's School, Watermoor School and Stratton School. However the minutes often don't record the effects of national changes, for instance the 1944 Education Act is not mentioned, so in writing an account of Cirencester schools for the VCH, other sources would need to be consulted. Examples of charities mentioned in the minutes include Christopher Bowly's almshouses, Edward James Burge charity, and Richard Matthews' Charity, which in 1929 apprenticed four boys in the City of London.

There are also regular mentions of the mop fair and markets as the council let out the stallage rights to various individuals. However it appears that the market rights were not totally in the council's control as following the death in 1939 of Robert Anderson (the High Bailiff of Cirencester), there is a reference to the stallage tolls no longer being under its control, but the minutes don't give enough detail to understand why. In 1936 there is an intriguing reference to an old Latin document which gave Mr Thomas Parry the title and lands of the seven hundreds of Cirencester and the various manorial rights that went with it. The council decided to give the document to Earl Bathurst for him to deposit at the County Records Office. As yet I have not checked whether this document has actually been deposited in the Archives.

Local authority minutes can also be used to get a feel for what trades were being carried out in Cirencester. Not only do planning applications detail where factories were built or premises altered, for instance into shops, but nominations to a food control committee that was set up during the Second World War and which continued until at least 1952, included representatives from retailers which gave an indication of where the different retailers were located in the town.

I will finish with references from

the last couple of minute books that I have so far examined. The minutes imply there were two military hospitals in Cirencester Park during the latter years of the Second World War, and the buildings of at least one were still surviving in 1949, when the Ministry of Health wanted to use 'a hutted camp' in Cirencester Park to house Polish families, but this was dropped in favour of Daglingworth. Then in 1951 there was a request from the Foreign Office to house technicians in relation to a proposed wireless station which appears linked to the setting up of GCHQ. There are plenty of such references that would need to be followed up before the account in the VCH could be written.

Jonathan Comber

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