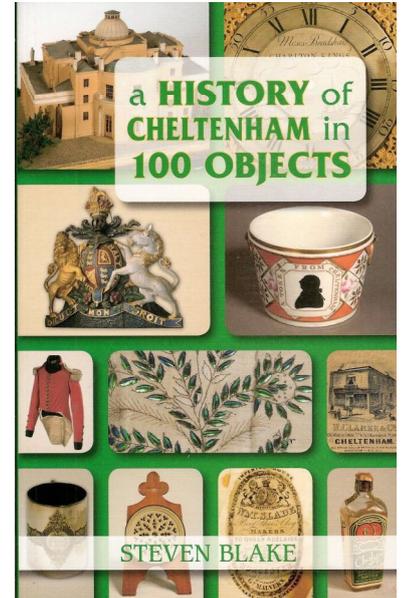


Book Reviews

Steven Blake, **A history of Cheltenham in 100 objects** (Stroud, The History Press 2013) 127pp., numerous illustrations, many colour. Cardcovers, £12.99 [ISBN: 9780752461199]

Museum & Collections Manager at Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum until his retirement in 2006, Dr Steven Blake is the person best suited to have produced this book, one of a series planned by The History Press. The decision to select only objects held in the Museum was sensible, given his intimate knowledge of the collections and, as readers of his earlier books covering the history of Cheltenham will know, Steven's familiarity with all periods and aspects of Cheltenham's history is second to none.

The content of this book does not disappoint. It is, I believe, meant to be read as a whole and enjoyed as such. It does not fulfil the requirements of a book of reference. It has no index, which is disappointing and frustrating to the reader searching to revisit an object at a later date. The contents page is by period, which from an historical perspective is helpful, but a list of the objects featured with the relevant page numbers, should, in my view, have been included.



Nevertheless, this colourful book is packed with illustrations and supporting text and is a joy to read. Given the vast number of illustrations the reader could be forgiven for believing there to be far more than 100 objects included in this volume. In his introduction, Steven explains that he has had to limit his choice to three dimensional items and printed ephemera and to exclude paintings, prints and photographs. Cleverly, he decided to include examples of the latter as 'supporting images', ensuring that each object's 'story' is told with a supporting visual image as well as text where applicable. One such example is the inclusion of a lithograph showing the location of The Female Orphan Asylum & School of Industry in Pittville, 1836 'supporting' the image of two pin cushions made by girls from the asylum. [p.37]

Steven suggests that the ultimate aim of this book is to demonstrate the value of museum objects in understanding our past and that only the reader will be able to judge if this has been achieved. Steven can rest assured he has done this and admirably. He acknowledges that there are currently gaps in the museum's collections not fully appreciated before producing this book but which can now be addressed. Modern ephemera and objects relating to present-day Cheltenham are one such omission.

I was especially pleased to see so much ephemera included and given the importance it so rightly deserves, even to the lowly paper bag discovered rolled up in a ginger-beer bottle when the site of Clarke's shop was excavated during the construction of Cheltenham's Northern Relief Road in 1984. [p.67]

The book is a handy size but with 127 pages the tight binding does not allow the book to be held and read easily. This format is more suited to a guide book to be carried around which cannot be the intention here. The attractive cover and wealth of colour throughout is pleasing to the eye but at £12.99 I would have expected a book in a format more suitable for the bookshelf.

Elaine North
Churchdown

David Elder, **Literary Cheltenham** (Stroud, Amberley Publishing 2103) 96pp.
126 illustrations. Cardcovers, £14.99 [ISBN: 9781445613185]

This volume seeks to provide ‘a fascinating collection of quotations and images that reveal the town’s rich literary heritage’ – an aim in which it succeeds admirably, largely due to the author’s extensive trawling of books, diaries, letters and poems from the 18th to the 21st century, seeking out what are often fleeting and incidental references to the town.

The book is divided into seven chapters, devoted to place, people, spas, education, sport, music and trade & industry. Each has a one-page introduction, putting the quotations that follow (of which there are no less than 126) into a wider historical context, while each quote or group of quotes is accompanied by an appropriate image, all of which are beautifully reproduced.

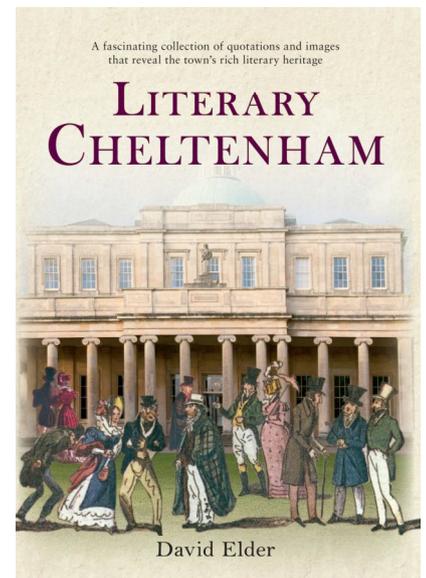
Apart from John Leland’s 16th-century description of Cheltenham as ‘a longe toune havynge a market’, all the quotations date from the mid-18th century onwards, the earliest (1746) being the actor David Garrick’s description of the town as ‘a damn’d dull place’, though he admitted that his ‘wont of relish for the

pleasures of Cheltenham’ was probably due to ‘a boil under the wasteband [*sic*] of my breeches, that greatly discomposes me’. Conversely, the most recent is a quotation from U.A. Fanthorpe’s introduction to the author’s previous book, a literary anthology entitled *Down Cheltenham Way*, published by the University of Gloucestershire’s Cyder Press in 2009, in which she seeks to dispel the town’s often-mistaken image as a place of ‘crusty old colonels, fading spinsters, afternoon tea and general depression’.

Both the quotations and the images are full of delight – and the latter (comprising paintings, prints, photographs and documents) are often imaginatively chosen; one of this reviewer’s particular favourites is on page 47, where the author uses modern photographs of the sign from the ‘Five Alls’ pub in Bath Road and a ‘composite’ photograph of four human-face corbels from St Mary’s church to accompany a poem of c.1820 by William Henry Halpin, listing the ‘men of every class and order’ who frequented the spas. My one criticism of the images is that they are not actually titled, or commented on in any way, in the text – to find out what they are (and it is not always obvious) one has to turn to a tightly printed list of Picture Credits at the end of the book – and even then the information is not always there; who, for instance is the gentleman on page 32, whose caricature by ‘Spy’ is used to illustrate a quotation from Jerome K. Jerome’s *The Angel and the Author*; one assumes he is meant to represent one of the many ‘retired British Generals’ who filled the town’s crescents and squares, rather than being a portrait of Jerome himself?

That minor criticism apart, however, the book is a most enjoyable read, and may be recommended to anyone interested in either local history or English literature.

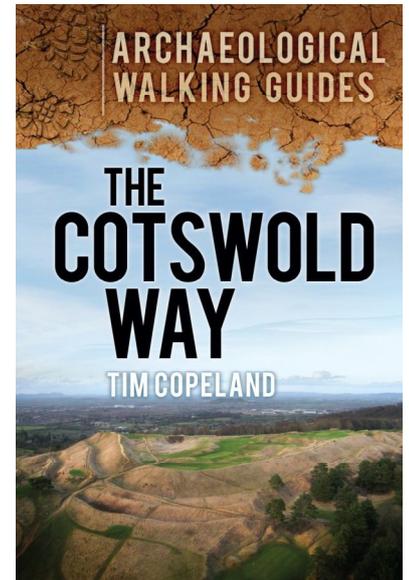
Steven Blake
Cheltenham



Tim Copeland, **Archaeological walking guides: The Cotswold Way** (Stroud, The History Press 2013) 160pp., numerous illustrations. Cardcovers, £14.99 [ISBN: 9780752467283]

The Cotswold Way is one of series of archaeological walking guides produced by The History Press which also include Hadrian's Wall and the South Downs National Park. Based on multiple visits by the author with friends along the Cotswold Way between mid-2011 and mid-2012, the work is generously illustrated with prints from Edward Burrows' *Ancient Entrenchments and Camps of Gloucestershire* (1924) as well as recent photographs by the author and others.

Following a useful introduction and set of sources this book, which mirrors Anthony Burton's *Cotswold Way* (2012) from Chipping Camden south to Bath, is arranged in six sections each with a theme such as stone, cloth, ceremony etc. and a short introduction. The bulk of the work consists of concise descriptions, with grid references, of the various sites on the route along with introductory notes to the small towns. In addition there are digressions, such as the view from the Cleeve Hill Escarpment and the archaeology of the Severn Valley, where the author addresses the reader as though they are standing there with guide in hand. Three pages of further reading provides a comprehensive bibliography of both on-line and printed sources broken down by area, topic and period.



Any book such as this is likely to reflect the author's preferences when it comes to choice of sites and this one ranges widely through time; from Palaeolithic flint scatters through Neolithic long barrows to Royal Observer Corps posts that were abandoned 25 years ago. While the author points out in the introduction that full academic sources to sites are not given in the text, some sites are none the less dealt with in greater detail than others; in particular the Belas Knap long barrow [pp.47-50] and the Lansdown barrow cemetery [pp.151-153].

Obviously there are points that one picks up on. For instance, the plans and maps are rather over reduced, plate 16 is not as stated [p.91] the canal junction at Whitminster and just because pilgrim badges from the shrine of St Edmund of Bury were found close to both Hailes Abbey and the site of the Tabard Inn, Southwark, does not mean that the former owner of the badge travelled between the two places as implied in the text [p.40]. Walkers travelling the whole route in a week, as this writer did (south to north) many years ago, will find that the detours necessary to view some sites will add considerably to each day's journey time and distance. Willersley Long Barrow/Camp and Woodchester Roman Villa are over 1km off route, while Spoonley Wood Villa is well in excess of that. Also a number of the sites included are either not standing structures, such as Hailes Castle [p.38] and the ROC post near Haresfield Hill [p.94] or are recorded locations of flint scatters [p.148] which may disappoint some readers.

Having said that, this book is well written and produced and will, no doubt, appeal to walkers of both shorter circular walks when one can devote time to a few features and to trail walkers wishing to learn more of those 'humps and bumps' in fields by the wayside.

Alan Tyler
Malvern

Carolyn Greet & James Hodsdon, **Cheltenham Revealed: The 'Town and Tithing' Plan of c.1800** (Cheltenham, Cheltenham Local History Society 2012). 76pp. Cardcovers, £5.00 [No ISBN]

Cheltenham Local History Society has had an admirable record of publication since its establishment in 1982. This comprises an annual *Journal*, a series of 'Chronologies', each published to coincide with the theme of the annual Local History Afternoon held by the former County Local History Committee, and several occasional publications, of which this is the latest.

Published to mark the Society's 30th anniversary, this work takes a detailed look at a previously unpublished large-scale plan of Cheltenham's central tithing that is included in the extensive collection of the Cheltenham solicitors, Ticehurst Wyatt, now held at Gloucestershire Archives (D2025). Neither its exact date, nor why or for whom it was produced, are known, but the authors believe it to date from sometime between 1795 and 1800 and suggest that it may have been produced either for a local 'authority' such as the Manor, the Parish Vestry or the Paving or Inclosure Commissioners, or for a local developer, such as Joseph Pitt. Although none of these seems to exactly 'fit the bill', one does wonder whether the fact that the Ticehurst Wyatt archive includes many papers relating to Joseph Pitt, and that (contrary to a statement on page 4) the plan does include Church Meadow, the site of Royal Crescent, Pitt's first major Cheltenham speculation (as well as Cambray Meadow and the future site of Pittville, both of which he also developed) might add weight to the suggestion that Pitt may indeed have been its instigator.

Despite these uncertainties, the plan provides a remarkably detailed 'cartographic snapshot' of a part of Cheltenham at the end of the 18th century. Fortunately, it includes the heart of the existing town, along its historic High Street, although sadly, similar plans for the parish's other five tithings – including the entire area south of the River Chelt, where the spa well was located and where Montpellier and much of the Promenade were soon to appear – have never come to light, and may never have existed.

The plan, which measures 64 inches x 30.5 inches, is reproduced in full as a two page 'centre spread', while a further 18 pages are devoted to detailed reproductions of sections of the plan, all printed on high-quality 'glossy' paper, which has ensured a high standard of reproduction. These 18 sections are then reproduced again within the body of the text, each of them annotated with letters to identify specific features, such as field names, paths, roads and prominent buildings. These are then named and, where appropriate, discussed in the accompanying text for each section, which draws upon existing publications and original research by the authors, both of whom have undertaken extensive work on the town's early modern topography. These 18 sections are preceded by an introductory essay on the plan's possible date and origins, its main features, and the various opportunities for further study that it presents.

As well as being full of valuable information in its own right, this book will be of particular benefit to anyone studying Cheltenham's historic topography – for whom the authors, and the Society, have done a great service by bringing the plan to publication. There is certainly a strong argument that one of the roles of a local history society should be to identify hitherto unknown or rarely used sources, such as this plan, and to make them available, through publication, to the wider community – which is, of course, something that the current admirable connection between the Victoria County History and local societies such as Cheltenham's is seeking to achieve.

Steven Blake
Cheltenham