

The BGAS Newsletter

Archaeology and history in Bristol and Gloucestershire

Established 21 April 1876

www.bgas.org.uk

Registered Charity No. 202014

Handel Cossham Bicentenary Conference

13th April 2024, Thornbury.
Organised by BGAS jointly
with ALHA

(See back page for more details.
Booking form enclosed.)

Also inside:

Excavations in South
Gloucestershire

AGM News

BGAS prize winner

PLUS the usual news
and reviews



Image courtesy of Victoria Art Gallery/
Bath and North East Somerset Council.

Introduction by the editor

Welcome to the latest issue of your newsletter, which should be reaching you slightly earlier than usual, around the end of February.

There are a number of important upcoming events to note, not least two which fall on consecutive weekends in April. On Saturday April 6th, the Society's AGM (see facing page) will take place at a new venue, the Community Hall in Little Stoke, South Gloucestershire, while on the following Saturday, April 13th, there will be a one-day conference in Thornbury, arranged jointly with Avon Local History and Archaeology, commemorating the bicentenary of local mine owner and philanthropist Handel Cossham. The agenda and papers for the AGM will be mailed directly to members in advance of that meeting; full details of this latter event are given on the back cover of this newsletter, and a booking form is enclosed.

Elsewhere in the newsletter, we have a report that first appeared in South Gloucestershire Council's Heritage and Archaeology newsletter on excavations at Lower Hazel in Rudgeway, near Alveston, which appear to have brought to light the remains of a



medieval hunting lodge. There are also articles by William Evans and Steve Blake that take the reader behind the scenes to explain some aspects of how BGAS works, as well as one by the General Secretary on the latest winner of the BGAS History Prize.

I hope you enjoy the contents of the newsletter, and would welcome contributions for further issues. My contact details are below.

Alan Clarke

**Note – copy date for the next newsletter is
31st July 2024**

Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society

(Established 21 April 1876, Registered Charity No. 202014. Website: www.bgas.org.uk)

President: Jan Wills

Hon. General Secretary: Dr Graham Barton, email: secretary@bgas.org.uk

Contact for Bristol: John Stevens, e-mail: johnregstevens@outlook.com

Contact for Gloucestershire: Michael Hare, e-mail: michaelharedeerhurst@tiscali.co.uk

Newsletter editor: Alan Clarke, email: newsletter@bgas.org.uk

BGAS Annual General Meeting

Saturday 6 April 2024 at 2.15pm

We are delighted to announce that this year's AGM will again be a conventional face-to-face meeting, commencing at 2.15pm on Saturday 6 April 2024 at **Little Stoke Community Hall, Little Stoke Lane, Little Stoke, Bristol BS34 6HR**. **Please note that this is a change of venue from that previously advertised.** The AGM papers, setting out the agenda and matters for consideration at this year's meeting, will be posted to all BGAS members in mid-March.

We hope as many members as possible will be able to join us on 6 April at Little Stoke Community Hall for our 2024 meeting. This year's AGM is taking place slightly earlier in the year than is usual, but we still anticipate that Volume 141 of the *Transactions* will be available for members to collect at this meeting.

BGAS Library open for visits

Readers are reminded that the Society has its own library, housed on the Hardwick campus of the University of Gloucestershire, in Cheltenham, which is an excellent resource of specialist books and periodicals on archaeology, architecture, history, geography and local studies. As well as a unique collection of local materials, there are also good runs of national series and other county society journals.

Visitors are welcome to examine our collection by arrangement with Anne Pengelly, who is currently deputising for the Honorary Librarian, but to borrow items you must be a member of the Society and have obtained a library card from the University by visiting the library and producing suitable ID. (No charge is made for this.)

You can visit by appointment and most books (up to a limit of five items) may be borrowed by members for up to two months. Appointments to visit the library may be arranged by e-mail at: archives@glos.ac.uk.

Meet our 2023 BGAS History

Cheltenham Racecourse was bathed in sunshine on the afternoon of 24 November 2023 when the Society's President Jan Wills and I visited this iconic Gloucestershire venue to present the prestigious BGAS prize to this year's worthy winner, University of Gloucestershire history student Em Langdale. The glorious autumnal weather created the perfect atmosphere in which the graduating students, finely attired in their formal academic robes and brightly coloured hoods, gathered to celebrate their academic achievement and mark the completion of their time at university, in the company of their classmates, family members and friends.

The presentation of the Society's History Prize is one of the landmark occasions in the BGAS President's term of office and Jan and I were delighted to accept the invitation to join the university's Chancellor, Lord Michael Bichard, and Vice-Chancellor, Claire Marchant, at their 2023 graduation ceremony. These are always memorable occasions and in addition to offering an opportunity to contribute to the much-deserved applause for graduating students Jan and I were able to enjoy the company of long-standing friends, such as our esteemed past-President Sir Henry Elwes, who was the university's Chancellor until 2021, and BGAS Advisory Council member Terry Haines, who is one of the university's Honorary Fellows.

The primary reason for our presence at this auspicious event, of course, was to present the 2023 BGAS History Prize to this year's winner, Em Langdale. As long-standing members of the Society may recall, the BGAS history prize was created in 2008 and has been awarded in each subsequent year to the university's best performing history student. The winner receives a cash prize of £200, together with twelve month's complimentary membership of our Society.

University of Gloucestershire graduation ceremonies are carefully choreographed events



and the presentation of special awards, such as the BGAS prize, take place towards the conclusion of proceedings, after the Chancellor has completed the principal business of awarding degrees or diplomas to each of the graduating students. Jan and I therefore had the pleasure of initially seeing Em walk across the stage to receive her BA degree from Lord Bichard, before she was invited back onto the stage by Dr Graham Parton, Head of the School of Education and Humanities, to receive the 2023 BGAS prize from our President, Jan Wills.

Following the ceremony Jan and I met Em more informally and we discovered that she grew up in Gloucester and chose to study history at the University's Francis Close campus after the course had been recommended by one of her friends. This advice clearly paid off for, as Em explained, 'I enjoyed having a small class and my lecturers were all supportive and helpful, especially during my third year. I also really enjoyed my course because of the 1950-1970s American modules, which is my favourite historical time-period'.

Prize Winner - Em Langdale

We asked Em what part of the course had interested or inspired her most and she was very clear in her reply. 'I've always enjoyed learning about America, especially the role of American women and feminism in the country. With the changes happening in America right now, with the reversal of the Roe vs Wade and the "Me Too" movement, it fascinated me to discover how far American women had changed, or in some cases, not changed at all'.

We asked whether Em's special interest had influenced her choice of dissertation topic. Em confirmed it had, adding, 'I focused on the Equal Rights Amendment for South Carolinian women and why this was never ratified in the 1970s and 1980s. I was really pleased to come up with my dissertation title, which was "Cakemakers and Barrier-Breakers: Women's Struggles over the Equal Rights Amendment in South Carolina, 1970s-80s"'.

Em stressed that US history wasn't the only topic covered in the degree curriculum though, and picking a theme much closer to home to illustrate this, she recalled a piece of local living history her group had been involved with. 'One of my group projects was the Kindertransport which focused on ten Jewish boys and their life in Gloucester during the Second World War. The boys lived in

a hostel near to Kingsholm Rugby Stadium and we used the Gloucestershire Archives to learn about their lives, jobs and what they did after their stay in Gloucester. We also attended the blue plaque unveiling when this was put on the former hostel'.

We concluded by asking Em what her career plans are now she's graduated. 'I'm currently working for the NHS', Em informed us, 'but I'd like to visit America one day, particularly South Carolina and would love the opportunity to continue studying the Equal Rights Amendment too'.

I'm sure all BGAS members will join Jan and myself in wishing Em success in fulfilling these dreams. Meanwhile, may we congratulate Em on being chosen as the 2023 BGAS prize winner and warmly welcome her as a member of our Society. As Em is still living in the Gloucester area, we hope that she will be able to take full advantage of the social and educational benefits BGAS membership provides and that we will be able to enjoy her company at the Society's local meetings in the coming year.

Graham Barton

Photo on facing page: Em with BGAS President Jan Wills at the ceremony, courtesy of the University of Gloucestershire.

Victoria County History update

In its latest newsletter (summer 2023), VCH Gloucestershire reports that three new volumes - covering the areas around Yate, Cheltenham and Cirencester - are now nearing completion, with the Cirencester volume due to go to press early this year. Attention is now turning to which areas should be dealt with next, and the County History Trust has elected to focus on two, in the north and the south of the County. Volume 17 will cover Winchcombe and the surrounding district, while Volume 18 will deal with the corner of the county historically bordering Somerset and Wiltshire, including Marshfield. See the VCH Gloucestershire website for more information and a map.

Thank you again, hand-deliverers!

As many BGAS members living within Bristol and Gloucestershire (plus a small number in Wiltshire and Worcestershire) will know, their copy of last year's *Transactions* (and, if a subscriber, their Record Series volume) were delivered by hand rather than by post, courtesy of the Society's valiant band of hand-deliverers.

In addition to those copies of *Transactions* 140 that were collected by members attending our 2023 AGM in Clifton, a total of 216 copies of *Transactions* volume 140 and 108 copies of Gloucestershire Record Series volume 37 were delivered by hand (including those of our hand-deliverers themselves). For both publications, the cost of postage and packing, when undertaken on our behalf by our printer, 4Word, was £5.80 per volume, so the total saving to the Society was an impressive £1,879.

So grateful thanks are due to the 20 individuals who undertook this for us, namely David Brown, Alan Clarke, Bill Evans, Peter Newley and John Stevens in Bristol and Jill Barlow, John Chandler, Jane Gordon-Cumming, Terry Haines, Alistair Hodcroft, Janet Hudson, Peter Hughes, John Izzard, Anthea Jones,



John Loosley, Alastair Robinson, David Viner, Peter Warren, Chris Webb and myself in Gloucestershire.

If any other BGAS member would like to help out with the delivery of this year's volumes, please do let me know, as many hands really do make light work – and save lots of money!

Steve Blake

BGAS Publications Manager

email: steven.blake@deltonglos.plus.com

Obituary: Dick Knight

We were very sad to hear of the death of one of our life members, Dick Knight of Castle Farm, Marshfield, who joined the Society in 1964.

David Smith writes: 'His most important contribution to local history was the preservation intact of the English Estate archives of the Codrington family of Dodington Park.

'In the summer of 1980 Sir Simon Codrington was in urgent need of cash to settle his divorce proceeding and gave notice to sell the family archive by auction in September. Dick Knight bought the papers by means of a bank loan and kept them safe until a public appeal raised the funds to buy them for the County Archive at the end of 1981.

'What a pity that he did not live to see completion of the VCH Volume for South Gloucestershire., which will include both Marshfield and Dodington.'

Printing BGAS *Transactions* and GRS

John Roost, proprietor of 4word Ltd, the firm that for many years has printed the Society's *Transactions* and the Gloucestershire record series, is retiring. 4word will close. Volume 141 of *Transactions* will be the last to be printed by 4word, to whom the Society is grateful for many years of excellent service.

The Society's Trustees will review how the Society arranges for its printing to be done. Printing accounts for about a third of the Society's annual expenditure. Of the individual UK member's £20 subscription, more than £6.50 goes on printing *Transactions* and newsletters. Of the record series £15 subscription, nearly £12 goes on printing a volume. So for the Society the cost of printing is important.

The price of print is influenced by many factors. One is the cost of raw materials, of which the main ones are paper and oil. As much paper, wood pulp and wood is imported, the cost of paper is affected by fluctuations in the value of the pound sterling against foreign currencies. Import duties now add to the cost of materials imported from or through the European Union. Similarly with oil, which directly or indirectly pervades every nook and cranny of the UK economy, not just printing inks, and is subject to price fluctuations caused by large-scale international events beyond the Society's control.

Another factor influencing the price of printing is technology. Printing is a mix of tradition and innovation. In 1998 the cost of a 16-page section of *Transactions* using colour was about £425; last year it was about £125. Savings from introducing new technologies help explain why for many years, in spite of general inflation, the cost per page of printing *Transactions* remained, until recently, about the same.

Perhaps the biggest influence on printing costs has been the internet. As people have gone over to e-mail and other forms of electronic communication, as readers read from

e-books, as students use digital sources rather than paper ones, and as societies publish their books and journals online, so the demand for print on paper has declined. The print market has contracted, and continues to do so. That has intensified competition among printers. Many businesses (mainly those that have not invested in new technologies?) have ceased to be competitive and have had to close. 4word is closing: it is not being sold. The resultant competition has helped keep print prices from rising as much as they would have otherwise.

Going digital can affect print costs in another way. The Society's Trustees are considering whether to offer *Transactions* and the record series to members in digital format, as many other comparable societies, including, for example, Bristol Record Society, now do. One consequence of offering members a digital option is to reduce the number of paper copies required. If the print run for a volume is reduced, the cost of printing is spread over fewer copies, so the unit cost of an individual copy goes up. Should those members who want paper copies pay the actual cost of a copy? Should those members who opt for digital pay a lower subscription because the Society does not have to pay for printing their copies? Should those who opt for digital subsidise those who want paper? Should the Society have one subscription rate for all members, or different rates depending on whether a member wants our publications in digital form or on paper? What will the demand be for digital only, paper only, or both? Experience of other societies that now offer digital suggests that institutions, such as libraries, still want paper copies, even if most students now expect learning materials to be available online.

We live in interesting times.

William Evans

Excavation at Lower Hazel,



An archaeological excavation has been taking place at a site at Lower Hazel in Rudge-way. Led by the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology at Bristol University and working alongside volunteers of the Thornbury Archaeology Group, the excavation has been focused on a likely Medieval hunting lodge that might have become embroiled in the civil war of the 12th century called the Anarchy.



When Henry I died in AD 1135, he had no male heir and so named his daughter, Matilda, as ruler of England. However, his nephew, Stephen, claimed the throne instead and this led to civil war. During this Anarchy period, Stephen was captured and held at Bristol Castle, which was largely impregnable. Unable to free Stephen from the castle, his supporters instead ranged around the countryside destroying buildings connected to Matilda's supporters. And it is possible that this hunting lodge suffered this ignominious fate.

Certainly, something seems to happen in the 12th century that puts an end to the use of the building as a hunting lodge, or at the very least as a semi high-status building. Arrowheads and spear points have been found during the excavations, but it cannot be said if these relate to an attack or were part of the hunting equipment for the lodge.

What is clear is that the site was abandoned until, maybe, the 13th century when it was reoccupied as a small cottage. A small ex-

South Gloucestershire

tension was found, and part of the site was remodelled into a kitchen. The investigations were undertaken as part of Bristol University's student excavations and as part of an international summer school. They are led by Dr Stuart Prior and will be continuing over the next three summers. Further information can be found at: Hazel Anarchy Research Project – Bristol Archaeology News.

<https://archaeology.blogs.bristol.ac.uk/hazel-anarchy-research-project/>

See also:

<https://www.rrarc.co.uk/news/new-findings-at-lower-hazel>

Article and images reproduced, with thanks, from the Autumn 2023 edition of the South Gloucestershire Heritage and Archaeology newsletter, produced by South Gloucestershire Council.



Interest rates and the Society

During 2023 the rises in UK bank rate and the consequent increases in rates charged by commercial lenders of money had effects, mostly adverse, on many individuals, businesses and other organisations. How did interest rate rises affect BGAS? The short answer is: very little. What follows tries to explain why.

One category of people affected by a rise in interest rates is those who borrow, or want to borrow, money. The higher interest rates rise, the dearer borrowing money becomes. BGAS has never borrowed, and its Trustees have no plans to do so. All of BGAS's expenditure is paid for by dividends from investments (which in 2022 paid for about 63% of what BGAS spent), members' subscriptions (18%), payments for funded archaeology articles in Transactions (10%), tax recovered under Gift Aid (2%), sales and royalties (2%), attenders' contributions to meetings (2%), donations, and the occasional legacy. BGAS has never needed to borrow, so pays no interest, so has not been and will not be affected by changes in the interest rates charged to borrowers.

Another category of people affected by a rise in interest rates is those who deposit cash with banks and other financial services providers. For many year BGAS's trustees' policy has been broadly to hold only enough cash for foreseeable needs plus an allowance for the unforeseen, and to spend the rest in pursuit of BGAS's charitable objectives or to invest it to provide income to fund those objectives. For several years after the banking debacle of 2008-2009, banks paid little or no interest on deposits. The real value of deposits is eroded by inflation, so in real terms the value of money deposited falls correspondingly. So from about 2010 there was no point in BGAS keeping money on deposit. In 2021, BGAS received by way of deposit interest only £6.28.

At the same time, Trustees were apprehen-

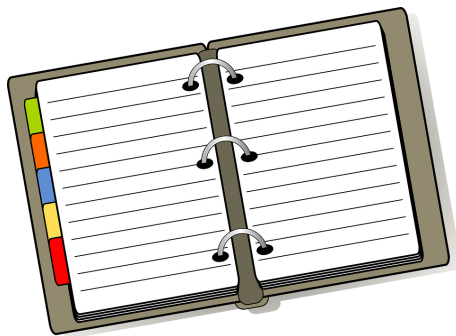


Image © acediscovery; Creative Commons licence.

sive about the Society's external financial environment generally. Investment values fluctuated, economic growth was impeded by government policies on austerity, businesses failed, and in many overseas economies the outlook was unstable. The coronavirus and governments' responses to it added to the uncertainties. BGAS's Trustees decided to reduce risk by holding larger than usual amounts of cash, even if that meant that its real value would be eroded by inflation. In addition, Trustees started to build up cash in a sort of sinking fund in order to pay for whatever might be decided to be done to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Society in 2026. As a result, at the start of 2023 BGAS held more cash on deposit than a charity of its size might normally be expected to. During 2022 and 2023, as rates rose, those deposits earned increasing amounts of interest, so that in 2023 BGAS received interest totalling over £1,700. So in that respect BGAS has benefited from the rise in interest rates.

That benefit has been offset by inflation. But that is another story.

William Evans



For your diary

The **final meetings of the season** for the Bristol and Gloucestershire branches of BGAS will be held in March:

- In **Bristol**, Richard Stride will talk about 'Sieges of Bristol in the English Civil War 1642-46 on the 18th March at 7:45pm. The venue will be the Apostle Room, Clifton Cathedral, Pembroke Road.
- In **Gloucester**, Andrew Pearson of Cotswold Archaeology will speak on the subject of 'Making a Living on the Severn Vale: The Invisible Potters of Domesday'. This event is at 7.30pm on March 27th at the Gloucester Heritage Hub.

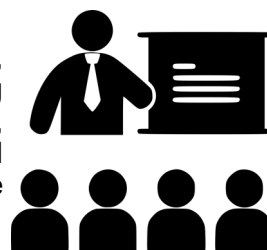
As mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter, the **Handel Cossham bicentenary conference** will be held in his home town, Thornbury, on Saturday 13th April. Details on back cover.

The 2024 **Bristol Early Music Festival** will be held on May 10th-12th at All Saints Church, Pembroke Road, Bristol BS8 3ED. As well as concerts every evening, there are talks, workshops, singalongs and the opportunity to look at period instruments. Tickets can be purchased for individual events, or you can get a single pass giving access to all of them. Details at the festival website: <https://www.bristolearlymusicfestival.uk/>



The 2024 **Deerhurst Lecture** will be given by Professor Michelle Brown on 21st September 2024 at 7.30 pm in St Mary's church, Deerhurst. Professor Brown is a distinguished scholar of early medieval art and culture. She was Curator of Illuminated Manuscripts at the British Library (1986–2004) and has published extensively on many significant manuscripts including the Lindisfarne Gospels. She has also worked on the early manuscripts of St Catherine's monastery, Sinai. The title of her talk is 'The Mercurian Marches and their Manuscripts'.

The **Gloucester History Festival** returns to Blackfriars Priory in September, running from the 14th to the 22nd, while the festival is also holding a spring weekend on April 12th-14th. Meanwhile, for those who, unlike your editor, prefer their history 'radical', the **2024 Bristol Radical History Festival** will take place on Saturday 20th April, from 10am-4.30pm at the M-Shed. More information can be found on the respective websites.



(Deerhurst image by Toby Catchpole; music notation image and clip art under Creative Commons licence.)

Book reviews

***Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman Features and a Saxon Burial at Spratsgate Lane, Shorncote, Gloucestershire.* Jo Pine, Thames Valley Arch. Monograph 44 (Reading, Thames Valley Archaeological Services 2022), xi+109pp., 29 col. plates. 27 figs., 32 tables. Hardcover, £17 [ISBN:978-1-911228-61-5]**

In the middle Bronze Age and late Iron Age the Upper Thames Valley gravels consisted of a tightly packed, highly organised prehistoric landscape with settlements every 0.5km. In between these heavily populated zones there were large areas of land devoted to agriculture with tracks and the occasional isolated settlement. It is in this intermediate area that the 8.5ha Shorncote excavation was situated.

One of the drawbacks of excavating on the Upper Thames Valley gravels is the damage by late Roman, medieval and later agriculture, especially ridge and furrow ploughing, truncating earlier features and destroying the stratigraphic relationships between them. This is more problematic if features are lacking in finds, such as those in isolated areas, or if they contain long-lived pottery shapes or fabric styles. An example quoted in this report is the 175 pits excavated with only one piece of worked flint as dating evidence. The author does admit that often details of the phasing are speculative.

The Neolithic produced worked flint and a 'placed deposit' of a polished axe, the late Neolithic/early Bronze Age a small ring ditch with a central inhumation burial and probable head and hoof burial (cow and calf) in the upper fill of the grave. An isolated middle Bronze Age crouched burial of a woman was identified. The later Bronze Age to early Iron Age is not well dated, mainly because of problems with stratigraphy and dating of pottery. Six round houses were identified but it was impossible to determine whether they were contemporary. Middle Iron Age activity

indicated possible cattle and goat/sheep farming.

Dating is crucial when dealing with surviving pits of what might have been linear features. The author proposes a middle Iron Age origin of a potential rectangular feature made up from a set of three segmented ditches, possibly allowing passage through for humans and animals, with the open side being the edge of a wood, the whole having a ritual (the dreaded 'r' word) or spiritual role. Here, not only the dating is tenuous but the function highly imaginative. However, that there was a wood somewhere close by is evidenced by a range of samples of charred wood from intentional deposition or accumulation of domestic waste associated with fire. The assemblage suggests an oak-ash dominated wood also containing hazel and willow which indicates preferred woods for different tasks.

Although isolated pits represented the late Iron Age and early Roman period, later a substantial trackway on the west of the site was traced northwards towards ditched enclosures with a well and some slight hints at a high-status building in the form of building materials. Close by was a cemetery of likely early and middle third century with three or four inhumations and eight cremation burials. Finally, in the southern part of the site, a Saxon burial of a robust adult male was retrieved who suffered two perimortem sharp force wounds probably two days apart when the victim was still alive. The isolated position suggests a particularly heinous crime.

Writing up the excavation must have been a difficult task with the archaeological recording having been undertaken by two different agencies 11 years apart. The result is a volume that is unable to add a great deal to our understanding of the prehistoric environment in the Upper Thames Valley.

Tim Copeland

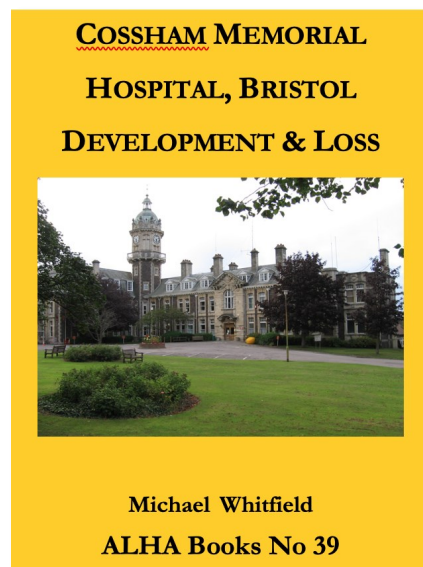
Michael Whitfield. *Cossham Memorial Hospital, Bristol: Development & Loss.* ALHA Books No 39, Avon Local History & Archaeology, 2023. 42 pp, many black/white illustrations. Paperback £3.50. [ISBN 978-1-911592-37-2].

I am a retired general practitioner and in 1976 I was, for six months, a senior medical house officer rotating between Cossham Memorial Hospital and Frenchay Hospital. I looked after Cossham patients on Fussell Medical Ward and did weekly medical outpatients. I remember the elegant and imposing Edwardian building and having lunch in what I think was the wood panelled board room. So I was particularly interested and pleased to read this narrative history by Michael Whitfield.

The monograph sets out to record the history of the hospital from its foundation to the present day. The author has used many primary sources, including minutes of the managing body from the Bristol Archives, contemporary local press reports and interviews with doctors who worked there. This piece of meticulous research fits in well with other accounts of the history of Bristol medicine, including the role of dispensaries by the same author. It is written in a delightfully personal style which vividly brings the triumphs and travails of a precious community resource to life

The aim of the book is to provide a comprehensive account of the hospital, which covers financial, staffing and building aspects, as well as a record of the surgical, medical, casualty, physiotherapy and diagnostic departments. It starts with the will of the founder, Handel Cossham, who was a colliery owner and, at his death, the greatest single employer of labour in the West Country.

Chronologically it deals with the ups and downs of the institution through the two World Wars and the formation of the NHS. Cossham's changes mirror the changes in medical care over these years in the whole of the UK. The winding down, with much local opposition, from a well equipped cottage hospital with many clinical staff to a modern community satellite centre with only outpa-



tients, limited diagnostics, a dialysis unit and physiotherapy, is well described.

One of the strengths of this publication is that it includes many direct contemporary quotes from local newspaper reports. There is a detailed description of the running-down of the operating theatre, the inpatient wards and casualty department as nearby Frenchay Hospital is transformed from being a USA military hospital into a British general hospital.

One of the most interesting themes is the feeling of the 90,000 local population of Kingswood, that this is 'Our Hospital'. Through the years of financial difficulties before the NHS and afterwards, the local people provided support and raised funds with fetes, dances and such, provided by, for example, the Ladies Needlework Guild and the Kingswood Miners Welfare Committee.

The author has researched this monograph extensively and in detail, with 70 references and 20 black and white historical photographs. Although the publication is only 42 pages long, nonetheless a short bibliography and an index, particularly of people, would have been helpful additions but overall the work fits well into the canon of ALHA booklets, many of which have focused on Bristol medicine and should be of great interest to local, social and medical historians.

Paul Main

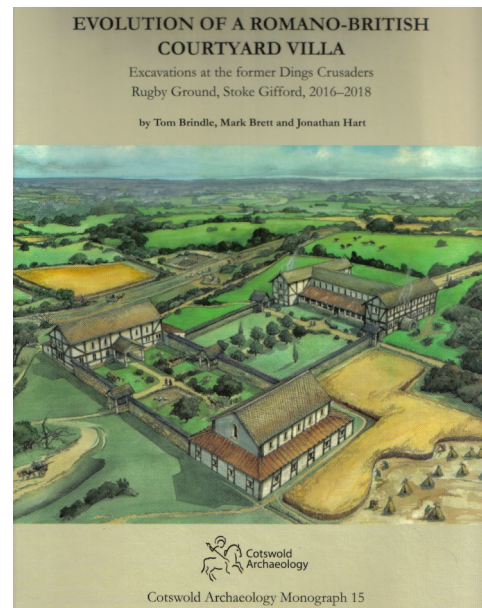
Book reviews (continued)

***Evolution of a Romano-British Courtyard Villa: Excavations at the former Dings Crusaders Rugby Ground, Stoke Gifford, 2016–2018.* Tom Brindle, Mark Brett and Jonathan Hart (2023). Cotswold Archaeology Monograph 15. Cirencester: Cotswold Archaeology ISBN 978-1-9998222-1-7 Hardback 240 pp. £35.00**

This well illustrated monograph documents an example of a previously unknown Romano-British villa situated at the boundary of South Gloucestershire and north Bristol, which archaeologists from Cotswold Archaeology were afforded the rare luxury of being able to excavate almost in its entirety. This enabled the site, which had lain protected under the turf of the former Dings Crusaders Rugby Ground, to be carefully examined over three successive seasons allowing the site's evolution to be revealed, from a humble mid-1st century AD round-house of Iron-Age tradition to a sophisticated 4th century courtyard villa.

The collection of structures found beneath the Dings Crusaders playing fields belongs to an important class of Romano-British rural villas of the winged corridor type, which frequently begin life in the late 1st or early 2nd centuries but subsequently evolved into more elaborate courtyard villas in the 3rd or 4th centuries when enclosing walls were built to surround the principal residential accommodation and adjacent outbuildings. The evidence from the Dings Crusaders site provides a valuable addition to the number of previously known winged corridor and courtyard villas within our region at Brislington, Kings Weston and Lyde Green. Each of these sites lie to the north of Bristol, close to known Roman roads and within the presumed hinterland of the important regional centre at nearby Sea Mills (Abone).

The monograph is clearly written and coherently structured. It commences by offering a brief account of how the Dings Crusaders villa was first discovered and a description of



the preliminary geophysical survey and trial trenching conducted prior to the eventual stripping and excavation of the main occupation area. These results suggest an unbroken continuity of occupation from the mid-1st century AD to at least the early-5th century, but within this period four distinct phases of development were able to be traced, before occupation was finally abandoned and the site gradually reverted to nature, to be remembered only as a fossilised feature in the landscape.

Specialist descriptions and analysis of each of the principal classes of man-made artefact and the biological evidence are set out in the central part of the report, with the approach taken by the authors being to provide a digestible summary of this material, referring specialist readers to Cotswold Archaeology's archives, where the comprehensive datasets may be accessed.

The authors conclude by considering what the material evidence from the site and its finds assemblage might tell us about the social and economic function of the villa and its role within its landscape setting. Synthesizing individual pieces of evidence from any site to reveal this wider picture is one of the most challenging aspects of any archaeological report, but the authors set out their conclusions effectively in drawing this interesting report to a close.

Graham Barton

Amy O'Beirne and Andrew Kelly (eds), *Bristol 650: Essays on the Future of Bristol*. Bristol Books, 2023. 176 pp. Hardback £20.00. ISBN: 9781909446373

Produced to mark the 650th anniversary of the city's 1373 charter, this book is a collection of some thirty essays 'addressing some of the challenges the city faces and sharing ideas about how we might meet them.'

Members of a society interested in the past and with the strapline 'engaging with the past' across its website might ask why we should pay attention to a work about the future. One reason is that the past has conditioned the present. It imbues our social and political institutions, the buildings we live and work in, the infrastructure on which we rely, the landscapes and wider environments in which we go about our lives. It has influenced the composition of the population and how we behave. Traditions, practices, habits and routines continue from the past into the present. The state of affairs now will similarly influence the future. As Lord Byron put it, the best prophet of the future is the past.

Another reason for examining the past before making proposals, let alone plans, for the future is that the future starts from where we are now. Mariners say there is little point in setting a course unless you know where you are. (More salty versions are available.) Where we are now has been determined to a large extent and in many ways by how we came to get here, and by the narratives we tell about that.

So the collection sensibly starts with five that explicitly look at Bristol's past. Eugene Byrne's insightful opener identifies the keys to Bristol's history as the port; immigration; religious nonconformity and radicalism; the city's expansion in the 19th century; philanthropy; and the adoption (not invention) of new technologies. The characteristics he identifies are the need for immigration; a sense of local autonomy; oligarchical rule; middle class activism; culture wars; and indecision about needed infrastructure.

The essays that look to the future are aspirational rather than predictive. Each author promotes his, her, or their own field of work or interest, from universal basic income to sustainability, from underground culture to inter-generational solidarity. As Mandy Rice-Davies almost said in another context, they would, wouldn't they? There is no cross-referencing, and little sign of collaboration, and barely a hint of how local political institutions might be used or changed in order to bring the unconnected utopias about.

A few of the essays explain how we got to where we are as regards a particular topic. In the most academically rigorous and penetrating of the essays, Martin Boddy expertly analyses the local economy and identifies factors that have promoted or facilitated its performance, and the consequent problems such as not enough housing, high house prices and rents, and shortages of labour. One criticism might be that his data come from surveys of Bristol and South Gloucestershire as one unit. Considering how much employment has grown in the north Bristol fringe – aircraft, aerospace, higher and further education, defence – one might question whether the city itself, as distinct from the wider area, has delivered the economic performance attributed to it.

An essay by Jane Duffus on the future of the high street helpfully traces how shopping locally has evolved from the 19th century.

Perhaps there is a historical value in the book that may not have been intended. In so far as the essays advocate change and progress to or towards better futures, they implicitly – and in the case of Jane Duffus's essay, explicitly -- deplore aspects of Bristol as it is, and the events and decisions that brought the present state of affairs about. Could the book become a useful source for future local historians, as evidence of aspects of the city in the early 2020s? Or of the diversity of values, attitudes and aspirations that this particular selection of citizens holds?

William Evans

**More book reviews can be found on the BGAS website.
See: <https://www.bgas.org.uk/publications/transactions-latest-reviews>**

AVON LOCAL HISTORY & ARCHAEOLOGY BRISTOL & GLOUCESTERSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY



Handel Cossham, 1824-1890

2024 sees the 200th anniversary of the birth of Handel Cossham, mine owner, geologist, philanthropist, temperance campaigner, local preacher, founder and funder of schools, and whose bequest funded the establishment of Cossham Hospital, Bristol.

To mark the anniversary Avon Local History & Archaeology and Bristol & Gloucestershire Archaeological Society are organising a day conference or local history day on

Saturday 13 April 2024

9.30am to 4.40pm

at Turnberrie's Community Centre, Bath Road, Thornbury BS35 2BB

Talks will cover Handel Cossham's origins and family; his career and development of his business in mining; his work on the geology of the south Gloucestershire coalfield; his charitable and philanthropic work, especially regarding local schools connected with Methodist and congregationalist chapels; his campaigning for temperance; his political activities as Bristol and Bath councillor, mayor of Bath and MP for Bristol east; and the history of Cossham Memorial Hospital on the borders of Bristol and Kingswood.

Speakers booked include David Hardwick, Steve Grudgings, Terry Ransome, William Evans, Alan Clarke, John Stevens and Michael Whitfield. His parliamentary duties permitting, the event will be chaired by Lord Murphy of Torfaen, a kinsman of Handel Cossham.

A display of artefacts and documents relating to Handel Cossham will be open at Thornbury library until 12.30 on the day. ALHA member groups and societies are invited to book space for a stall in the community centre during the event.

CATERING

Tea and coffee will be served during the day. The Centre is close to cafes and shops for food at lunchtime. You can also bring your own lunch if you prefer.

TRANSPORT AND PARKING

Buses passing the centre include T1 and T2 from Bristol, Filton, Cribbs Causeway, Bradley Stoke, Almondsbury and Alveston; 201 from Gloucester, and 60 from Dursley. There is public parking close to the venue, and elsewhere in Thornbury.

COST

The cost of £15 per person will include tea and coffee, and as usual we offer two free places to any group bringing a display or items for sale.

BOOKING

Booking can be via Eventbrite at <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/handel-cossham-1824-1890-tickets-774889725027>

Or you can send the enclosed form by post or e-mail to the ALHA treasurer (details on form).