



# STAFFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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## Lichfield Cathedral being used as a centre for Covid Vaccinations February 2021

With articles by John Hunt, Betty Fox, Peter King, Sue Whitehouse and Trevor James

## Reflections on the Success of Zoom

To borrow a phrase, the last twelve months have truly been an *annus horribilis*. Few anticipated that the 'lockdown' on society, initiated in March 2020, would still be with us a year on, or that, in the view of many commentators, there will not be a return to 'normal', whatever we think that might be, for some considerable time yet. It seems clear that the current campaign of vaccinations may not be sufficient to draw a veil over these traumatic events.

After the initial shock, we have all sought out whatever means was available to enable us to lead our lives as best we can. This, of course, reflects the efforts of society as a whole. It has often not so much been a matter of devising entirely new ways of working, but of taking and developing approaches, practices and technologies that were already available, but sometimes relatively limited in their application across the everyday lives of many of us.

It is precisely this 'learning curve' that the members and committee of this Society have been on since the autumn of 2020, when we first began to seriously debate the possibility of turning to online presentations as a means of keeping in touch with our members; meeting their interests and, in a small way, alleviating the monotony of lockdown. The decision to move in this direction was not taken lightly. We tried to be mindful of the disadvantages as well as of the advantages implicit in such a step. It required that some members of the committee developed their competencies in working with this digital technology, an effort spearheaded by Paul Norris who took up the technical challenge of enabling and overseeing the hosting of our Zoom meetings, while for Brian Bull, who organises our programme of speakers, it added the burden of bringing together not only a fairly intensive programme, but one in which the speakers were prepared to deliver their sessions online. Many speakers find the prospect a daunting one as it requires different skills to those associated with actually standing in front of an audience – an experience that few of us have enjoyed since March last year. We have also relied on Keith Billington to promote the talks and to provide the digital link between the committee, our programme, and the membership, as he has ensured that speakers and members alike have the information that they need to join these meetings. We recognised from the outset that this could only succeed as a collaborative venture, but that raised few fears as this is the way the committee works anyway.

However, we nonetheless approached our Zoom programme with caution, and hopefully, some sensitivity. We realised that no online 'get together' could replace the experience of meeting together physically in order to pursue our shared interests, and to enjoy the company of like-minded friends. Furthermore, we were unsure what interest there might be among our members in an online programme; in particular, the inevitable exclusion of those members who do not have access to a suitable computer or device, or those who lacked confidence in using a technology that they may not have thought about before.

Nonetheless, as the Coronavirus restrictions were embedded and extended further, we came to the conclusion that we had little option other than to pursue our policy. In this we were greatly enthused by the encouragement of many members, following the

launch and results of a membership-wide survey, and by taking note of what was happening in wider society. More and more societies like ourselves, national, regional and local, were turning to similar measures. Many of the educational and professional organisations, from which many of our speakers are drawn, were having to engage with this technology on a daily basis in order to engage with students and colleagues. And, most important of all, the population in general was becoming increasingly adept in acquiring and using facilities like Zoom to keep in touch with family and friends. A tool that before the pandemic had been aimed primarily at the Board Room, was now brought increasingly into our lecture rooms, and above all, into our living rooms. This latter development was the most persuasive of all.

At the time of writing we have about three months of Zoom sessions (and some Zoom committee meetings) behind us, and many more in prospect; in fact we will have presented as many as 19 Zoom lectures between January and June, something of a feat in itself. We were all a little anxious at the first session, hoping that we would not meet any technical issues, and uncertain as to how well the initiative would be received by our members. Truth be told, every session starts with some of us 'crossing our fingers', hoping that the gremlins will keep away for the next two hours. In the event, we had something approaching a hundred participants for our first talk, and an average attendance since then of some eighty or so people, including 98 on 19<sup>th</sup> March. Of course, there will be technical problems from time to time. They are inevitable. But they also occur in our Guildhall meetings, when the computer decides to update, is not working properly, or proves incompatible with a speaker's prepared presentation. Then we recall the 'good old days' of 35mm slide projectors through rosy spectacles, forgetting how frequently they jammed, the bulbs went, or the slides used were awful! On the whole, our Zoom speakers have been audible and their presentation illustrations very clear.

The committee remains acutely aware that some of our members have not yet been able to participate in our Zoom sessions, or perhaps continue to feel anxious about the technology when they do so; and so for them in particular, but actually for all of us who enjoy meeting together on Friday evenings, or participating in visits and field meetings, we look forward to re-establishing our 'physical' programme of meetings as soon as possible. In this, we are in the hands of how the government's guidance in the future might change, and the ability of venues to comply with whatever requirements are put before them.

However, we feel that our Zoom programme has proven a marked success and we have learned much along the way. Committee members and participants alike have become increasing familiar with using the technology, and while we can never be complacent, it does not pose the same challenges that it once did. The significant numbers that have participated over the last three months suggests some level of enthusiasm rather than simply grudging necessity. It is also clear that we have been able to engage some members who would not otherwise have been able to attend our meetings in Lichfield, due to inclement weather, health, or difficulties of travel. Indeed, our furthest-flung member who has been able to join us regularly lives in the United States. A round trip from California to Staffordshire on Friday evenings has been made possible by Zoom. Furthermore, the range and diversity of the speakers that we have been able to invite to speak to us has similarly expanded. We can now realistically look across the whole country and beyond for speakers when thinking about how we

shape our programme of talks. The Zoom programme was certainly born out of adversity, but it has 'earned its spurs' and so will remain, in some way, a part of the mixed programme of events that the Society will seek to offer members when life returns to normal. We will return to this in a later update.

John Hunt

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### **On the Theme of Tin Tabernacles ...**

On 26<sup>th</sup> March Ned Williams gave a well received Zoom talk to the Society:

*Any Old Iron – Tin Tabernacles and Other Buildings.* Member Peter King provides a follow-up in that he has an interesting recollection from the early days setting out in his chosen career. He writes:

I was an articled clerk with a firm of solicitors in Birmingham. I was given the job of arranging sale of a redundant chapel of ease located in East Birmingham. This was in fact a 'tin tabernacle' which had when bought probably in the 1920s, been put in the name of the then vicar, but paid for with funds raised by a public appeal. My first task for the sale was to have the property vested in the diocesan trustees, following a procedure under the *Vicars and Churchwardens Trusts Measure* (the vicar no longer with us). With this in process, the next task was to put the chapel on the market. Before too long, two interested parties came forward but the estate agent involved could not get either to make a proper offer. The alternative course was therefore to stage an auction. This was the mid 1970s when at that time a small terraced house could be purchased for considerably less than £15000. At the arranged auction there emerged two rival bidders, perhaps the original two interested potential purchasers. Both were representatives of local Pentecostal Churches. I was at the auction and remember that one of the parties would raise the bidding by £100 increments, then the other by £10 increments! I cannot remember exactly but the bidding gradually crept up and up in the said fashion from round about £3000 to something like £7000 when one of the two decided they couldn't go any higher and dropped out. The hammer fell and the successful purchaser was asked to sign a contract of purchase there and then in the auction room, in accordance with practice. In fact though the contract had to be a conditional one, as the vendors were powerless to convey the property until such time as the procedure to vest the 'tin tabernacle' in the diocesan trustees had been completed. This ultimately was achieved, but not without a wait. The corrugated iron structure did eventually see itself taken up by its new church occupants who, one presumes, were delighted with their new place of worship. Altogether though an unusual piece of work to attend to. How one 'tin tabernacle' came to change hands, though not use. One wonders, is it still there today?

Peter King

## Found and Lost

### The Chi-Rho Bowl discovered at Wall in Staffordshire

We often read in the press of unusual items which are brought to valuation days organised by various auction houses, and then we follow the frisson of excitement when such an item is then successfully sold for an unexpectedly high price.

In the historical and archaeological world, sometimes, however, we are aware of the reverse situation. An item is unearthed or discovered, reported and exhibited, and then disappears from public view and awareness.



One such example is a small bronze bowl excavated at Wall, the historic Letocetum, in 1922. It was exhibited in 1924 by a Mr F. Jackson of Wroxeter at a meeting of the Birmingham Archaeological Society, and fortuitously was photographed, but has not been seen since that time. Why is a 3 ½ in. diameter bowl made of very thin and embossed metal so important? The



reason is that it bears the early Christian Chi-Rho symbol. The fact that it bears this symbol is now much more significant to us than when Mr Jackson excavated it at an undisclosed location at Wall a century ago. The reason why it is now so much more significant is that a series of mid-twentieth century discoveries of the early Chi-Rho symbol at various Romano-British sites means that this bowl is part a much earlier Christian story in Britain. The presence of the Chi-Rho motif tells us that Christians were present at a location in Roman times. A Roman mosaic at Hinton St Mary in Dorset [discovered 1963] and a wall decoration at a Roman archaeological site at Lullingstone in Kent [discovered c1949] are both structural examples that exhibit the Chi-Rho symbol and are very visibly potent and substantial signs of the emerging evidence of that early Christian presence and Wall's bronze bowl is a significant element in this archaeological jig-saw.

The Chi-Rho evidence is something of a counterbalance to the picture provided by the Venerable Bede in his *A History of the English Church and People* [AD 731], from which source it would be easy to form the view that active Christian mission had commenced in south-east England under the leadership of St Augustine from AD 597; and that a parallel mission had reached Northumbria from Iona in ADc635. Bede's acknowledgement of a continuous Christian presence from the Roman era was very sparse: his determination to ignore the Christians of the west and south-west was broken twice when he reported an unsuccessful meeting between St Augustine and some of their representatives in AD 603 and the fact that St Chad was originally consecrated by Bishop Wini of Winchester and two 'British bishops' whose status was not recognised by the Roman Church. This thus had rendered his consecration uncanonical because they were not part of the clear Apostolic Succession from the time of St Peter. The general picture presented by Bede is one of the newness of Christian activity rather than continuity. The Chi-Rho evidence is an antidote to that perspective because it confirms a degree of continuity, and this is continuing further to be informed by modern archaeological discoveries.

This discovery at Wall is of national importance but it also emphasises the reality of a continuing Christian story from the days of the Roman Empire, long before St Chad came to Lichfield in AD 669 and suggests at the very least that, when St Chad arrived, he was coming to a location which already had a continuing Christian presence.

Trevor James

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## A Collaborative Ph.D.

The National Trust at Shugborough is involved with an exciting research project in collaboration with Cambridge University. It is a PhD funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council and the student carrying out the work is Alice Whitehead. The overarching subject matter is the Anson brothers and the 18th century Atlantic economy, putting Shugbrough into context as an example of how English country houses and estates were actually the product of global influences and fashions. Alice's working title is 'An (Im)perfect Paradise: Materiality, space and the embodiment of empire at Shugborough Hall' and her research will particularly explore George Anson's interests in South Carolina and whether wealth flowed from this, as well as his prize money from the Spanish treasure ship, back into the development of Shugborough. Her findings will feed directly into the Global Connections theme that the NT will be developing over the coming year and which will be the focus of the re-presentation of the mansion and its collections in 2022. Despite Covid

restrictions, Alice did manage to visit Shugborough's garden and parkland last summer - and staff look forward to welcoming her back in 2021. - Sarah Kay (*From the Shugborough National Trust Newsletter January 2021*)

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**Tracing Your Prisoner Ancestors: A Guide for Family Historians**, Stephen Wade, Pen and Sword, 2020, 176p, £14-99. ISBN 9781526778529

This is part of a very helpful series that has been produced by Pen and Sword. In this volume Stephen Wade guides us into a potentially unfamiliar area of family and local history.

We are introduced to historical methods of imprisonment, and indeed to historical forms of punishment, with excellent local examples from Stephen's own research to illustrate exactly what might be found.

Instinctively we might imagine that imprisonment would not have been likely to occur in our own families. This probability is turned on its head by the extremely interesting example of the Revd Samuel Wesley, John Wesley's father, who was imprisoned in Lincoln Gaol in 1705 because of a mischievous allegation of indebtedness. The case is interesting in itself because Samuel Wesley's diaries reveal the details of prison conditions at that time but also draws us into the political faction fights of the time which had led him to be a victim of a political manoeuvre. This illustrates just how many families might have been touched by the prison system.

Later chapters carefully reveal to us the range of possible offences which might lead to incarceration, along with an exploration of possible sources. In one sense this is all very straightforward but Stephen does provide us with a very clear explanation of what we are likely to find.

This volume guides us into recognising the breadth of what might be encompassed in such sources. Having identified previously that my great-great grandfather William Cater had been arrested in London in the 1870s, at the direction of the overseers of the poor, for neglecting his family, this book provides me with the necessary tools to explore what did happen to my distant relative, and to answer the question of whether or not he was actually a criminal or a victim of circumstances, much like Samuel Wesley.

Trevor James

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The Richard III Society is pleased to announce the publication of Polydore Vergil's *Life of Richard III* edited and translated by Stephen O'Connor. The main text comprises a full transcription and translation of the original working manuscript of Polydore Vergil's *Life of Richard III*, completed some 20 years before the first appearance of his *English History* in published form. The Latin and its English translation are printed on opposite pages. Variations in the manuscript are added as footnotes to the Latin. The brief Introduction provides a biography of Vergil and discusses the manuscript and the printed editions. Appendix 1 contains sections deleted from the manuscript in Latin and in translation. Appendix 2 is a summary of the variations between the manuscript and the later published versions. This new edition enables readers to compare Vergil's three later printed editions with his earlier unpublished version and

draws attention to the principal changes that he made during his revisions. Stephen O'Connor took degrees in Classics (University of Nottingham) and History (Bedford College, University of London) before completing a PhD on late medieval London history under the supervision of Professor Caroline Barron. After five years working as an assistant editor on the Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources he took up a post with the Public Record Office/National Archives as Head of Medieval and Early Modern records in the Reader Services Department. He is currently Associate Tutor in Medieval Latin at the University of East Anglia. xiii+73pp, 2 illustrations, fully indexed ISBN: 978-0-904893-21-2 Price to general public: £7.50 plus £1.69 p&p within the UK. Available from: <http://www.richardiii.net/> (select 'Society Shop' and a catalogue appears with an order form) The Society's sales agent is: Richard III Sales, E-Mediacy Ltd, 5 The Quadrangle Centre, The Drift, Nacton Road, Ipswich, IP3 9QR e-mail: [richardiii@e-mediacy.com](mailto:richardiii@e-mediacy.com) (For queries only please, no orders can be placed via e-mail).

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## Ordinance Survey Midland Group

### Wednesday May 19th, 7:30pm. Midland Group Meetings

The next meeting has been booked and will be on Wednesday May 19th at the Wall Village Hall in Staffordshire (Watling St, Lichfield WS14 0AW) commencing at 7:30pm (Covid-19 permitting). Please note the meeting is a week later than previously. Future meetings are to be held on the 3rd Wednesday of the month in January, May & September. Please contact [Lez Watson](#) for more details.

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## Knockers

For those of you who have played the board game Monopoly, you'll have heard of the 'Get Out of Jail Free' card. Well at Durham Cathedral they have the Sanctuary Knocker. This bizarre object on the Cathedral's North Door played an important part in the history of the Cathedral. If you had committed a serious crime, possibly murder in self-defence or escaping from jail, you could run to the Cathedral and rap the knocker. This would give 37 days of sanctuary in the Cathedral during which time you could try to reconcile with your enemies or plan an escape.

The Cathedral entrance has since changed, but it originally had two small chambers above the doorway with windows where the monks would be seated keeping a watch out for sanctuary seekers, to let them in promptly, at any time of the day or night. When somebody did seek sanctuary in the Cathedral, the Galilee bell would be rung to announce it. The sanctuary seeker would be given a black robe to wear, with St Cuthbert's Cross sewn on the left shoulder to distinguish them as one who had been granted sanctuary by God and his saint. The Right to Sanctuary was abolished in 1624.





Text and image courtesy of the Churches Conservation Trust.

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In March of this year the Historic Libraries Forum issued the following notice

*We are alarmed by the growing number of reports about large, often publicly funded, cultural and heritage institutions with libraries holding nationally or internationally important unique and distinctive collections (as defined in [RLUK 2014](#)) proposing to make library and archives staff redundant. Whether or not a consequence of many staff in specialist libraries being furloughed over the last year, the proposed redundancies highlight a concerning perception of library and archives staff as being “non-critical” to the mission of the parent organisation.*

*Library and archives staff fulfil an essential role in managing collections to internationally recognised standards, safeguarding collections for the present and the future, and providing intellectual (whether digital or physical) access to those collections to their colleagues as well as the wider public. The obligation to manage, safeguard and provide access to collections is particularly strong where those collections are held in trust for the nation.*

*Without the specialist skills and knowledge that library and archives staff bring to an organisation, there is an increased risk to culturally valuable UDCs being neglected or worse: sold and dispersed for short-term financial gain. It reduces the capacity for curators to interpret objects with complex histories in their care, which in turn risks a severe loss of opportunity for the public to engage with these histories and objects.*

*We fully understand that in the current financial climate, adversely affected by the global pandemic as well as Britain's exit from the European Union, difficult decisions must be made by cultural and heritage organisations of all sizes.*

*However, we would call upon the leaders of these institutions to carefully consider the severe and possibly irreparable loss of specialist skills and knowledge the cuts to libraries and archives staff and services would create, as well as the risk to national and international reputation that would follow from significant UDCs being neglected or sold.*

*We urge leaders to work with recognised professional bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, the Archives and Records Association, and the Museums Association, as well as smaller specialist organisations such as ourselves to understand the full implications of proposals beyond immediate financial savings*

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### A YEAR IN THE TIME OF COVID

Where have they gone, those twelve months? What have I got to show for it? How many books read? A Bill Bryson, Lady Glenconner's extraordinary Life and an attempt at The Mirror and the Light but it was too big and heavy to read in bed so is still waiting. I did do a *very* difficult jigsaw –Jan Bruegel the Younger 'A Village Festival', about 120 little people mostly misbehaving.

There was gardening of course, in fact I completely changed the front garden. Well I planned it and other people did most of the work. I watch the people walking by with their dogs but no-one seems to notice all the daffodils. I didn't go out for exercise, a greatly overrated pastime to my mind.

I did have a wonderful day out in Derbyshire with family and a friend in June, but it rained hard on the way home and I was glad I was not driving the A38.

I have not done much housework, nobody's been. I did polish the sideboard the other day. Other standards have been kept up though. Except for one occasion I have always eaten my evening meal sitting at the dining table, albeit with the newspaper propped up in front of me. Mother would have been horrified. I am thankful not to have had to do home schooling. I am also glad to have discovered Greek yoghurt with ginger thanks to my niece's shopping.

What about my favourite hobby? All that wool remains unspun, the yarn unknitted. I did weave a nice scarf for the Craft Stall but nobody bought it. Perhaps at Easter... My spinning friends have all kept in touch via Zoom. Ah! Zoom, what would we do without it? I have arranged things so that my background is the obligatory bookcase but I believe that is now considered somewhat passé. Committee meetings, lectures, the excellent News From The Past, multi chats where it is hard to get a word in edgeways. Sometimes it is better with a simple phone call. There have been lots of those and I do thank everyone who has kept in touch.

Reading all this, don't think I have been sad or lonely, I have had my bubbles, one legal, one not quite so legal for Christmas Lunch. I just feel I have wasted opportunities. However, things will be opening up soon. I have had both my jabs, I have booked two short seaside breaks in the UK. The Mazda has a new set of tyres, I shall fill her up with petrol (the first time since December 11<sup>th</sup>) and next week sally forth to Middleton complete with Simnel Cake to greet my volunteer colleagues.

Things can only get better – can't they?

Betty Fox

March 26 2021



### **Wall (Letocetum) Roman site and the Friends of Letocetum: come and see us!**

Although the site museum is still closed at the moment (it may open later in the year), the remains of the baths and mansio are open all the time and admission is free. There is a small car park nearby. English Heritage information panels explain what you can see, and in addition The Friends of Letocetum, who would normally be manning the museum, will be on site to welcome visitors and tell you more about the site, from 11am to 4pm on: Saturday 1 May, Sunday 2 May, Monday 3 May, Saturday 15 May, Sunday 16 May, Saturday 29 May, Sunday 30 May, Saturday 12 June, and Sunday 13 June.

So please come and see us! You may well have been to Wall before, but it is always worth another visit because you'll probably learn something more about the site. It is all open air and it is a large site, so social distancing is easy. There is also a walking trail around the village.

For more information and the virtual site museum, visit

<http://www.wallromansitefriendsofletocetum.co.uk/>

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The Staffordshire Record Office in Stafford reopened on 13 April 2021 having been closed since Christmas. With social distancing still relevant only a few places are available each day and if you wish to go then it is necessary to book in advance, indicating which items you wish to see. Phone 01785 278379.

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### **Online Conference by The Dugdale Society**

You may not have heard of The Dugdale Society, but this Society, based in Stratford upon Avon, has been publishing edited transcriptions of Warwickshire's important local historical records dating from the 11th to the 20th Centuries and making them accessible to family, local and academic historians for over 100 years. (We hold some in our library).

They are holding an online Conference on the weekend of the 15/16th May 2021 and it is free. The Conference is called Warwickshire's Changing Past and for further details go to <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/warwickshires-changing-past-dugdale-centenary-conference-tickets-147765377221>



### Dr Nigel John Tringham MBE

Nigel was awarded the MBE in the 2021 New Years Honours List for services to local history in Staffordshire. We congratulate Nigel for his achievements and this very much deserved honour.



The final volume of the Victoria History of Staffordshire edited by Nigel, covering Tamworth and Drayton Bassett, was published on 21 January 2021; available at all good booksellers, £94.50

## Zoom Lecture Series 2021

The final lectures in our 2021 Spring Season will be:

*7th May*

*Dr Matthew Blake*

*Stories From the Edge: Creating Identities in  
Medieval Staffordshire*

This paper proposes that there is a tendency for the area that became 'Staffordshire', an important constituent part Mercia, to be reduced to what is seen as its most important early medieval centres, namely Tamworth (especially for the earliest period), Lichfield (the ecclesiastical centre), and Stafford (as a royal burh and later shire town): these are certainly the places that have attracted the interest of archaeologists and historians. Beyond the urban centres gravel extraction along the Trent Valley and the subsequent finds such as those at Catholme have further emphasised an eastern bias in discussions about the county as does the survival on early medieval stone sculpture to the north and east. How then do we find ways to discuss the rest of the county which formed part of the Mercian heartland and which remains absent from so many of the discussions concerning the early medieval period? Discussion follows.....

*14th May*

*Penny Ward*

*Flaxmill Maltings Shrewsbury*

The Main Mill at Shrewsbury Flaxmill Maltings, built in 1797, is the first iron framed building in the world, and as such is seen as the grandparent of the skyscraper. This talk will take you through the history of the site, why it is here in Shrewsbury, who built it, its 90 years as a Flaxmill and its 90 years as a Maltings taking us right up to the present day and its current refurbishment thanks to a National Lottery Heritage Fund Grant of £20.7m

11th June

Dr Mathew Morris

*The 1173 and 1645 Sieges of Leicester*

A closer look at the English Civil War in Leicester and the sieges of 1173 and 1645.

18th June

Rebecca Jackson

*The Bawdy Courts of Lichfield*

The church courts tried cases concerned with church business from the collection of tithes, the alteration of church buildings and the conduct of clergy to matters concerning the health of souls. The 'bawdy' courts as they were called in common parlance got their name because of the sensational and often scurrilous nature of the church court cases. Cases concerning immorality and defamation required witnesses to report on the intimate goings on of their neighbours. This talk will look at the types of cases heard by the courts, how the courts functioned, and about the people who came to the court to plead their case, defend their good name, or simply give their testimony. Please be prepared for some offensive language, from the original documents, not the speaker!.

Members who have provided an e mail address to Keith Billington will be notified of the lecture three days in advance and will receive a further e mail on the morning of the lecture giving details of how to access the lecture. Lectures start at 8.00pm on Friday evenings with joining possible from 7.30pm onwards. **The lecture on 18 June will be preceded by the Annual General Meeting at 7.15pm.**

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Burton Library

**Burton residents will be able to have their say on outline proposals to move and improve the town's library at a series of public engagement events this summer before a final decision is made next year.**

The library proposal is one of seven connected projects that aim to revitalise the town centre economy, bringing more footfall and businesses into the town centre. They make up the Burton Town Investment Plan, which was awarded £22.8million by the Government's Towns Fund in the spring Budget.

It is a once in a generation opportunity to transform Burton's library service using ringfenced central Government funding, rather than money generated by local taxpayers. By moving to the historic Market Hall, it would also see major investment in preserving what is one of the town's finest heritage buildings and ensure it stays in public use for future generations.

This summer a comprehensive public engagement programme will take place where people will be able to have their say and help shape future services. Details of this programme will be drawn up in the coming weeks and will need to reflect Covid-19 restrictions at that time. The library proposal is still under discussion and will be subject to a full business case being agreed by government. A final decision will not be made until March 2022.

## Exploring your Local Heritage

If there is one positive thing about the Covid restrictions we have been living under for almost a year it has given us the impetus and opportunity to explore places closer to our homes. No more weekend jaunts to visit stately homes and national parks but gentle saunters around the streets and open spaces nearby.

One good place to start planning your own local heritage walk is the Historic England ‘Search the List’ website pages (<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/>). I especially like the map search option. Simply pop in your postcode and zoom in and out looking for little blue triangles which indicate listed buildings. Whilst the list descriptions vary in detail they give, you will find enough information to start your explorations. You will also find scheduled monuments and registered parks and gardens on the map search. Having the local ordnance survey map to hand will also show you where to find public footpaths. Plan a route and away you go. If you can’t get out of the house for any reason try a tour using Google street view.

Mike and I recently took a 6 mile walk on a bright but freezing cold day which took in a surprising number of listed buildings. Starting with the Church of All Saints – mainly Victorian now but once at the heart of mediaeval West Bromwich. There are some remarkable headstones to explore, some dated back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Pausing only for sustenance from the lay by snack van – bacon sandwiches and coffee – we continued along the Newton Road and soon came to Bishop Asbury’s Cottage. A modest little house listed because it was the boyhood home of Francis Asbury, a leading light in the early Methodist church in America.



Bishop Asbury's Cottage

Next we drop down a steep path to the Tame Valley Canal crossing to the other side after a short while using the grade II listed Brickfield Turnover Bridge installed to cross the new canal in 1844. Walking through a modern estate we soon reach Red House Park. This park contains several features of interest including the so called Hermits Cave – a series of mysterious

tunnels dating from Victorian times – and an obelisk dedicated to Princess Charlotte Augusta who died in childbirth in 1817. Had she lived Victoria would never have become Queen! The Red House itself, listed Grade II, dates to 1841 and stands on the site of one or more earlier houses. It was at risk for many years but was finally converted to luxury apartments in 2017/18.





The Red House

Returning to the canal we walk to the junction with the Rushall Canal where we find another listed canal

footbridge nestled between the M5 and M6! Picking up the Beacon Way we start to head homewards passing Wigmore farmhouse, now a riding centre, dating back to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century and a pleasant reminder of the rural past of this now largely urban area. Our need for heritage sated we toddle home, slightly footsore but worth the effort. Time to plan the next excursion!!



Footbridge at junction of Tame valley and Rushall canals

## Sue Whitehouse

### News from Walsall Council

Some excellent news to report from Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council. As some of you will be aware there has not been a dedicated full time conservation officer at the council for many years although a shared archaeological service with Wolverhampton Council is working well. Recently however, not one, but two new appointments have been made. Devinder Matharu has now become full time conservation officer after working for many years in development management in the planning department at the borough. A second appointment is Benjamin Parker who holds the position of Heritage Programme Manager a post that is being supported by a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Walsall is one of 13 priority areas identified

by the Heritage Fund in their most recent strategic plan and the only one in the West Midlands. These areas have received least Lottery funding in the past and are also areas that experience deprivation. The Lottery will focus their efforts to enable organisations to make applications for funding to support local communities in protecting and promoting their local historic and natural heritage. Benjamin previously worked for Historic England on heritage at risk and as part of his new role at Walsall he has been tasked with developing a Walsall Heritage Strategy.

Sue Whitehouse

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### **SA&HS Transactions Volume LII for 2021 - Imminent**

At the time of writing, next SA&HS Transactions Volume LII for 2021 was expected to have been published with the print run received from the Printers just before the end of April. Postal despatch of copies to the Membership should take place in May, so please anticipate arrival through your letter-box by the end of the month. You'll find that the front cover image is of St Chad as depicted in stained glass in the north choir aisle of York Minster (window n8). It is a remarkable piece visually which is repeated in the article within: *'Glorious Confessor': The Cult of St Chad at Lichfield Cathedral during the later Middle Ages*, written by David Lepine.

Keith Billington

### **2020 Society AGM**

As a result of the Government restrictions associated with the Covid-19 pandemic it was not possible for the Society to hold its 2020 AGM as was planned in December 2020. It is now intended to hold the AGM 'virtually' through the medium of Zoom as a preliminary activity to our last Zoom lecture of the 2020-2021 season on 18 June 2021 at 7.15pm. Further details of the AGM will be circulated to all members in due course.

**Steve Lewitt Hon. Sec.**

**Our autumn programme of lectures will start in September, in the Guildhall Lichfield if possible, if not by Zoom. We see the way forward as lectures in the Guildhall on a regular basis, as before, supplemented by occasional Zoom talks. Excursions will resume whenever it becomes possible. Details later.**

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The views expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Society.

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