North Staffordshire Historians
An association of researchers, writers, tutors and lecturers in family, local and regional history

NEWS AND VIEWS
Volume 16 : Issue 3
November 2015

Your next meeting is ........
Friday November 13  Dr James Bowen
Weather, climate and the historical implications thereof for discussion
Based now at Liverpool University, James Bowen will come to discuss the importance of past extreme weather events such as floods, droughts and violent storms as historical episodes in themselves, as well as how an analysis of patterns of weather variations since 1700 feeds into current explanations of climate change.

Friday December 4  Chris Copp
Staffordshire Past Track and its future

Friday December 11  A social symposium on bees in bonnets
at 14 Berne Avenue; 7.30pm
(see below for details)

All Friday meetings at the New Fire Station, Knutton Lane, Newcastle ST5 2SL at 7.30pm

This Invitation to our meetings is only restricted by the agreement that the maximum number attending should not exceed twenty-five.
Please let Paul Anderton know that you will be at the next meeting.
paulberne14@gmail.com

As an avid listener to radio Oliver Leech was struck by the following thought expressed by Lisa Jardine, the historian who died recently. This came in one of her contributions to Radio 4’s A Point of View programmes. She was talking about trying to find out more about her father, Jacob Bronowski, from her mother who was unable to remember the sort of information Lisa wanted.

‘Nothing could bring home to me more sharply the importance of memory for history. Nothing more strongly reminds me of the responsibility those of a historical temperament have to document and record events in the present as they unfold, lest future generations forget’.

Are you recording the past as well as delving into the past? Do you agree with this opinion?

This is the link to the transcript of what Lisa said:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-34665882

Jon Heal writes ........
One of the joys of coming to the Friday meetings is that sometimes a gap in the story I am piecing together is filled in by somebody else’s research. So it was with the ‘Devil in the Potteries’ that Keith talked about in October.

I knew the title from a couple of postcards made by William Blake, the Longton photographer, in 1908. In the picture you will see one of the notorious Smokey Stoke views, this one taken from the top of the old Empire theatre with the Stafford Street shops where Blake worked barely visible beyond the smoking kilns of Tam’s potbank. The cards are not necessarily a direct response to Rev. Tyrwhitt, Vicar of Fenton, whose sermons in 1903 on the loose morals and drunkenness of the locals caused such a stir. But clearly the concept of the devil in the Potteries was one familiar to people. Blake’s image might just as well have been about the devilish pollution people suffered.

In fact, the more extreme version by Blake has the title ‘The ‘Real Devil in the Potteries’ with the Devil brandishing Monopoly, Private Land and Private Capital in his hand to threaten the hard-working families of Stoke-on-Trent. The postcards date from 1908 at which time Blake was active politically, becoming secretary of Longton Labour Church and a member of the left-wing Social Democratic Federation. He was also probably involved with Clarion whose cycling clubs delivered their socialist newspaper around the district. Another of Blake’s postcards uses the same smokey image and has the caption ‘An Imperialist Dream England the World’s Workshop’. There is also one captioned ‘20th Century Hell’, although when the image was used much later by other postcard publishers, the caption was reduced to the harmless ‘When Stoke Stokes’. The originals had a hard-hitting and grimly ironic message. Tyrwhitt had left the area by the time the cards were on sale, but his sermons could still be used to sell a different story.
The Devil in the Fire Station

Keith’s talk at our last meeting on the ‘Devil in the Potteries’ sermons by the Rev Tyrwhitt of Fenton in 1903 on the appalling immorality to be found in the Potteries was entertaining and very stimulating. This one untypical and minor event, and the controversy surrounding it, shows very well the difficulties historians have making generalisations about anything. The end of the talk was only the beginning of the questions, which rapidly become difficult or impossible to answer.

Tyrwhitt advertised his sermon and this was picked up by a journalist aware of the potential for a controversy in the making. Thereafter, it became controversial in the Potteries and used in newspapers further afield. But what questions arise from this?

What was Tyrwhitt’s motivation? He had an aristocratic background and was a geographical outsider as well. What did he know about life on the potbanks and how did he know it? Did he welcome the controversy or not? Well connected to royalty, why did he come to the Potteries?

To what degree was the way he viewed the world shared by the people of Fenton?

Not only was he attacking some working-class people, but also the manufacturers who allowed such disgraceful behaviour. However, the patron of his living, William Baker, was a pottery manufacturer who happened to live in Gloucestershire, a friend of Elgar.

Religion is obviously central to the controversy. This was an Anglican event, though nonconformists might also agree with Tyrwhitt. He was preaching to the world through his congregation. The bazaars held at the church to raise funds drew in his aristocratic friends and connections, including the Prince of Wales. Anglican and aristocratic – but not exclusive insofar as for one of the events attended by the prince, with a 2 guinea entrance fee on the first day, sold 300 tickets. But only 300, and dissenters were not invited onto the committee. So it was exclusive.

The presence of aristocrats and even princes did not draw stones and riots, but enthusiasm. Did the people of the potteries – some of them – view these people from a distant galaxy in the same way as the aristocrats saw themselves?

What did they think of the Potteries? In what sense is there a shared British/English mentality?

Civic pride was injured by Tyrwhitt’s attack and Arnold Bennett wrote a perceptive letter to ‘th’ Sentinel’. But who felt this civic pride and what did they feel? Was it only the letter-writers who did? How could we tell?

The role of newspapers in creating the debate is central. Without them there wasn’t an issue of general interest. ‘Immorality’ (of other people) sells newspapers and through them views were freely aired – but was the area so depraved? Who are we to believe and on what evidence? And what did people mean by immorality anyway? Was there a clear definition held in common by everyone?

The questions I’ve posed here seem like a set of either/or, but what I got from the talk was the complexity of this nicely circumscribed and localised case study. And if this example is so complex and in the end so hard to fathom, how can we make the generalisations ‘Potteries’, ‘Anglican’, ‘aristocrat’ – let alone create fancy ideas of historical periods like ‘The Age of Uncertainty’, ‘Edwardian’ or even ‘The First World War’?

So Keith, I look forward to the next instalment when you’ve sorted these minor points out.

PS Thought for the day: what happens to Keith’s talk now? How can it be brought to an awaiting public?

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Plans for new £4m Staffordshire History Centre move a step closer

Posted on Friday 23rd October 2015

Plans which could see the development of a new multi-million pound modern history centre for the county have moved a step closer.

The plans were agreed by the Staffordshire Joint Archives Committee on Thursday 22 October and could see the creation of a new History Centre on the existing Records Office site on Eastgate Street in Stafford. As custodians to the county’s heritage, the Staffordshire Archives Service is responsible for millions of historical records documenting the county’s fascinating history.

A former prime minister, brewer, authors, potters, and a general’s letter written about the Christmas Day truce of 1914 are just some of the records in the collection. Josiah Wedgwood’s baptism certificate from 1730, marriage certificate for Charles Darwin and Emma Wedgwood and baptism records for Dr Samuel Johnson, author of the first English dictionary and Izaak Walton author of the Compleat Angler are also held by the service. These along with
over six million parish records, documenting the lives of ordinary people date back over 1,000 years and would be available in the new centre and online. The proposals follow months of consultation with the public, local historians and depositors and will now see an application for funding made to the Heritage Lottery in December. Ben Adams, Cabinet Member responsible for the Archives Service at Staffordshire County Council explained that it was an exciting time for the service and now that the plans had been approved they could move to the next stage to make the vision a reality.

Ben said: "The new centre, with more accessible facilities, better storage space, more room for exhibitions, along with plans to take more activities out into local communities will give us a much more modern sustainable service for the future. At the same time, we will continue our work to get more people interested in their family history, including our project with findmypast to digitise over six million records including parish registers, wills and marriage bonds. Over four million of these are already online and free from our records offices and libraries and we hope to have the rest available very soon."

The County Council would contribute £412,000 to the cost of the project, with an additional £100,000 coming from the Joint Archives Committee reserves. A further £150,000 is also expected to be raised through other grants, foundations, businesses and charitable trusts.

If you would like to be kept updated about this project, please send your email to us at staffordshire.archives@staffordshire.gov.uk

Jim Sutton wants to draw your attention to a book which he can offer to you at a bargain price!

THE LOCAL HISTORIAN vol.45 no.4 (October 2015)

CHURCH LAWTON MANOR COURT ROLLS 1631-1860 edited by Guy Lawton (Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire vol.143 2013 Ix+297pp ISBN 9780902593824) £30

Church Lawton is in south-eastern Cheshire, almost on the border of Staffordshire, and the manor has been held by the same lords, the Lawtons, from the Dissolution in 1541 to the present—the family also owned over 90 per cent of the land through most of the period. The population was essentially static at around 350-400 people from the 1630s to the 1770s, but there was a considerable increase thereafter. Although it was a predominantly agricultural township, the editor of this volume has found evidence of a commercial saltworks here from the early eighteenth century onwards. In short, it was a fairly unexceptional sort of place and thus perhaps an ideal case study for anyone looking to reconstruct life in a rural community.

This edition comprises full, precise transcriptions of the proceedings of the manor court from the 1630s to the 1860s, carefully contextualised in a lengthy introduction and in appendices that include tax listings for the locality alongside other information. The manor court met annually and dealt with a wide range of issues, from traditional agricultural nuisances such as 'removing the lord's soil' and encroaching on the common pastures to more serious offences such as fighting and stealing. The court served both to protect the rights of the lord and to enforce the norms of the community. Thus, in 1641 the jury of tenants not only presented seven people for selling horses without paying a toll to the lord, but also presented Thomas Cartwright for lodging vagabonds and the wife of Edward Brooke for being a 'scold' who disrupted the peace of the neighbourhood.

The activity of the court declined considerably over the course of the period, particularly through a shift away from presentments for theft, violence ('affrays'), and the regulation of baking and brewing ('the assize of bread and ale'). Still, it continued to maintain lists of tenants and regulate some aspects of village life. In 1777, for instance, the jurors fined William Norbury 7s 6d 'for getting drunk and breaking Moses Walkers Jack Chain by Holtering it about his Neck with an intent to make himself away in'.

The volume will obviously be invaluable for anyone interested in the history of this area, but it is also one of the best editions of any manor court rolls currently available, so it will be useful to historians attempting to work with these sorts of records for other localities. The inclusion of both the original Latin and the English translation makes it valuable as a tool for learning how to decipher these sources. The fact that all the jurors and suitors to the court are frequently listed (and thoroughly indexed) makes it an excellent resource for reconstructing the local population. One hopes that an edition of Church Lawton’s earlier surviving rolls, covering the period 1541 to 1628, will soon follow.

Brodie Waddell

An appeal for assistance

I am writing on behalf of the Knotty (North Staffordshire) Coach Trust, and I'm writing to ask if you could potentially help in behalf of the research side of our organisation. Essentially the Knotty Coach Trust is an organisation established to restore and preserve the remaining North Staffordshire Coaches that served in the period between 1876-1907.

Therefore, I am writing to possibly request your help, or assistance regarding the research side of the Knotty Coach trust.

You may be able to help the Knotty Coach Trust's research efforts to potentially find formerly unknown rolling stock, and build upon the historical knowledge that the organisation has developed over the years.

Any help you could give would be greatly appreciated, and I hope to discuss this with you further.

Regards;
Aleksandar Katic

contact is via Nigel Tringham at n.j.tringham@keele.ac.uk
Ian Bailey writes again

‘But Montaillou itself is much more than a courageous but fleeting deviation [It was infected by the heresy of Catharism] It is the factual history of ordinary people. It is Pierre and Beatrice and their love; it is Pierre Maury and his flock...’ (p.356)

I’d like to offer a couple of comments on two extraordinary books as part of my efforts to bring myself up to date. They are the very recent ‘Montaillou’ by E. Le Roy Ladurie, published only in 1978, and the slightly less recent ‘Religion and the Decline of Magic’ by Keith Thomas (1971).

‘Montaillou’ was a present I received in 1987. I tried it but gave up – couldn’t see how he could make such detailed comments about a village in Southern France at one time or another: fortune telling, divining for lost goods, healing by charms, or conjuring for treasure’. I have a few examples, mainly of witchcraft (not given here), but on magic according to the above definition:

1. Some money was stolen from a labourer’s house at Yarnfield, nr Stone. It was suggested that the victim visit a ‘wise woman’, or witch, in Hanley. This was done and the 8 sovereigns returned as she had predicted. ‘The affair has created a great sensation in the village’. Staffs Advert 18.2.1865.

2. When her grandson had jaundice, Mrs Woodward (of Butt Lane?) was recommended by some neighbours to go to Mrs Harris and have the child’s water charmed...I believed in the charm and Mrs Harris she had often cured people in that way.’ Staffs Advert 25.2.1871.

Naturally, you can see where this is heading: I wonder if you have information to add. We could do witchcraft as well.

The desired work programme is:

- Shrewsbury, part 2, further aspects of the Borough of Shrewsbury — currently under way;
- Wem — a ‘short’ single-place study, to be published in 2017;
- Newport and the Weald Moors — much had previously been done on this volume, and publication is hoped for 2019–20;
- Ludlow — another short study, though it may include its surrounding rural parishes;
- Bradford North, including Market Drayton and Whitchurch — the next full-length ‘red book’;
- Shrewsbury, part 3 — covering the villages of the liberty of Shrewsbury.

It is now necessary to convert the local enthusiasm into action. Most important – and most difficult, I suspect – is to raise the funds needed. To raise money for a ‘one-off’ project is difficult enough; in my opinion to do so year after year may be impossible unless some core donors can be signed up.

Also needed are volunteers (or teams of volunteers) to catalogue collections, to undertake research and to write elements of the VCH volumes. All donors and volunteers will receive regular newsletters, invitations to attend events – there is to be at least one major event a year – and will be appropriately acknowledged.

VCH Shropshire relaunch

Professor Richard W Hoyle, Director & General Editor of the Victoria County History, introduced the project to an audience numbering more than two hundred at Shrewsbury on 31 October. Volume I, covering natural history, Domesday, earthworks and industries, had been published in 1908; Volume II on religious houses, schools, sport and the population tables in 1973; Volume III on local government and parliamentary representation in 1979; and Volume IV on agriculture in 1989. Then followed three topographical volumes covering much of the centre of the county. Work on further volumes ceased locally in 2002 but continued in London. A further volume was published in 2014: Volume VI, Shrewsbury part 1, covering the Borough’s general history and topography; this was organised by the VCH Central Office and achieved largely through the voluntary work of experienced local historians with the assistance of the Marc Fitch Fund. This left about two-thirds of the county needing their local volumes.

A local committee has now been set up to move the project forward. A limited company has been registered and charitable status is to be sought. The next stage is to raise the necessary funds required to appoint a part-time organiser to manage the project, to recruit and train the volunteers who will do the majority of the research and writing, and to edit the volumes. The annual cost of the organiser’s salary and the other expenses is estimated as £25,000 to £30,000.
News of an unusual proposal now in the planning stage

Have you lived in the North Staffordshire area long enough to remember the early days of Radio Stoke? Do you remember when it had programmes devoted to local history and subjects of local historical interest? Perhaps, therefore you remember the producer of so many of these, Arthur Wood.

Many of Arthur’s programmes survive on out of date tape format, but a move has started to digitise these and make them more widely available. To set these in context and expand knowledge of how these were made and what listeners made of them it would be helpful to have your memories of Arthur and his programmes.

Please contact Rose Wheat for more information.

The rare survival of the Mid-Staffordshire Military Appeal Tribunal (1916 and 1918) records, which we hold here at Stafford Records Office, is a fortuitous one as it was ordered that all records be destroyed after WW1, making the existence of this collection particularly significant. As we close in on the centenary since their creation their survival and the supporting archives offer a real opportunity to learn more about the war in Staffordshire, and its effect on communities at the time.

Since the HLF funded project ‘Staffordshire Appeals: Opening access to Staffordshire’s Great War Local Military and Appeal Tribunals’ began back in September 2014, we now understand more clearly the stresses and strains on work and family life during the ‘Great War’ both for individuals and the community as a whole.

Between February and June 2016, we will be conducting talks and workshops to promote this work and create an opportunity for people to find out how the war affected their local community.

If you feel that this is a subject your members would be interested to learn more about, including the Tribunals, personal testimonies, conscientious objectors, agriculture, industry and education in your area, please email Rachael Cooksey, Project Officer at Stafford Records Office (rachael.cooksey@staffordshire.gov.uk) for more information.

Best wishes

Rachael

Rachael Cooksey
Volunteer Coordinator and Staffordshire Appeals Project Officer

Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent
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Staffordshire County Council
Staffordshire Record Office
Eastgate Street
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ST16 2LZ

Direct No: 01785 278482
(Only available Tuesday to Thursday, 9am – 5pm)
Email: rachael.cooksey@staffordshire.gov.uk
Thoughts on composing a book on the history of coal mining in North Staffordshire.

Few people today pick up lumps of coal as part of daily routines at home or at work. Fewer still would think of it as a solidified form of energy. Advertisements don’t shout about its virtues as a source of light and heat, or as the origin of power to drive machines. Yet for at least 300 years dirty slabs of rock or piles of black, powdered coal, often called ‘slack’, were the essential ingredients of what is commonly known as the British Industrial Revolution. North Staffordshire was at the forefront of that commercial and social movement.

Every ton of coal had to be dug out of the earth’s crust, normally deep underground, for the most part manually with pick and shovel. This, of course, was in the past, and the past has gone. Yet some vestiges, some evidence, must remain so vast was the activity of coal mining. Given the historical importance of the industry one might expect to see the story of mining to be prominent in public displays of the economic development of the region. This is not so.

A visitor to North Staffordshire staying even for a few days can easily miss the signs of its coal mining industry. They are hidden away, overshadowed, disguised, and in some cases neglected. There is no ‘Angel of the North’ type announcement of the one crucial feature of the history of the area which did more to determine what is seen now than almost anything else. It will be obvious that within the City of Stoke-on-Trent there once was a massive industry manufacturing pottery. Some remnants survive, and, relatively speaking, flourish. Steelite, Dudsons, Emma Bridgewater and Portmerion lead where once Spode, Doulton, Wedgwood and Minton headed a list of scores of smaller firms. An afternoon in the Gladstone Museum, The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery or the Wedgwood Visitors’ Centre will open all eyes to a long history of technological and fashion changes in the techniques of making pots and their design and decoration. None of this would have been possible without an almost inexhaustible supply of energy.

There were two principal power sources. People power was crucial. This is visibly demonstrated on a factory tour at Moorscroft or at Burgess & Leigh. Sheer physical effort, continuously applied to a wide variety of tasks, even today with considerable numbers of machines to help, is a marked feature of the trade. The other energy source was coal. Not just in small amounts, but in huge quantities.

It wasn’t the steam engine which initially made coal necessary as a fuel. Mechanisation associated with steam power was a second stage development. Coal fired the kilns before James Watt played with his toy engine in Glasgow. Coal continued to supply the heat required for firing every kind of ceramic ware for most of the industry until the end of the 1940s, if not later. One estimate was that twelve tons of coal was needed for every ton of ware. Steam driven machinery added hugely to the demand for coal, and was far from confined to making pots. Coal almost entirely replaced wind, animals and water as sources of energy in North Staffordshire not long after 1800 across most forms of textile, iron, and pottery manufacture. It left only a small use of water power, for example, to grind corn and flint.

Coal could be dug from the ground over a much more extensive area than that of the present City of Stoke-on-Trent. Pits were sunk from Cheadle to Kidsgrove and from Cheddleton to Leycester – or would you start in a different way?

In the latest TLH Shropshire gets two references, Leek one and Lawton one. Are you a member of BALH as an individual? Jim Sutton has our communal copy, but the Association thrives on the basis of individual action. Costs £30 which sound a lot, but 8 journals a year are included in this. The article by Margaret Bird on beer supply in Norfolk is very rewarding reading.