



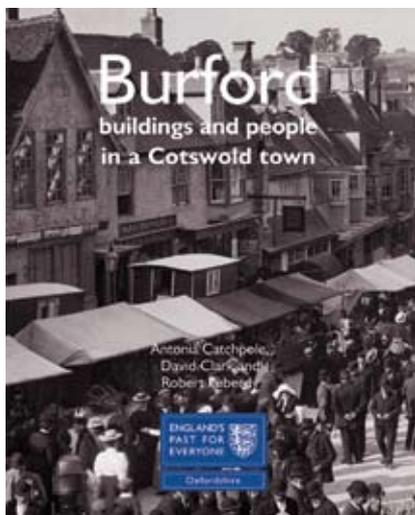
Bringing local history to life

From the editor

In this issue we celebrate the launch of two more books, *'Sunderland and its Origins: Monks to Mariners'* and *'Burford: Buildings and People in a Cotswold Town'*.

Our star of 'Meet the Team' is Production Assistant, Jessica Porter, plus hear how intrepid volunteer, Philip Cousins, got on when we attended the 'Who Do You Think You Are?' exhibition at Olympia.

History of Burford launched



The Burford front cover

With the first of Oxfordshire's two EPE paperbacks *'Burford: Buildings and People in a Cotswold Town'* now available, the last few weeks have seen a flurry of activity to celebrate the project's completion.

The book launch itself was on 6 June at The Great House in Burford, by kind permission of the owners. John Beckett, the VCH Director, presented a copy of

We also have news of a new woodland walk in Ledbury, updates from Cornwall, Kent and Exmoor and the usual round-up from our Project Manager, Catherine Cavanagh.

Finally, our Bristol Team Leader, Madge Dresser, has written a play, based on her EPE research, for an exciting Bristol theatre project. Catch it if you can!

the book to the Lord Lieutenant Hugo Brunner (also president of the Oxfordshire VCH Trust), and speeches by representatives of the County Council, the Trust, and the VCH/EPE Team were followed by a fascinating account of the house by the architectural historian Nicholas Cooper, who researched it for the EPE book.

Built around 1700 for local physician, John Castle, the house includes some remarkable panel paintings, some of which contain images of turreted towers as a pun on Castle's name. Guests were also able to view the long gallery on the top floor, before spilling into the garden to enjoy the fine June weather. The local bookshop sold over 30 copies at the launch, and reports strong interest generally - the day before the launch, one lady phoned BBC Radio Oxford during an interview with the EPE Team Leader to ask where she could get a copy! CONT...

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The EPE Annual Report 2007 is now available from the website.

John Beckett presents a copy of the book to Lord Lieutenant Hugo Brunner



CONT...

In May the Oxon team took part in a packed and hugely enjoyable History Day in the town, alongside colleagues from the County Council's Heritage Services, EPE volunteers, and friends from Burford. Following a schools visit in the morning around 300 people

passed through the doors, and feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Our EPE Burford Probate Group displayed a variety of wills and inventories (both originals and transcripts), and showed some of the 17th-century costumes which one member has been making, inspired by the unusually detailed information on dress in some of the Burford wills. The EPE Team demonstrated the Explore website (which now has nearly 150 Burford items), led a guided walk around the town, and sold over 40 books.

Meanwhile, work continues on the paperback on Henley-on-Thames, which will be launched in just over 18 months. More building recording and fieldwork with volunteers is planned for the summer, and several chapters are already in draft. More in a future *EPE News*.

New woodland walk

On 7 June the Mayor of Ledbury launched a new walk through Frith Wood.

Thanks to a grant from the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, EPE volunteers have been working with experts from Herefordshire Archaeology to record sites in the woodland. The accompanying booklet also includes contributions from wildlife, geology and woodland track experts. A pdf version of the booklet will soon be available on the EPE website.



The town crier gathers a crowd

Explore website launched at national history show

The calm before the storm...



Our Explore website was launched to the public at the 'Who Do You Think You Are?' national history show, which took place at Olympia, London on 2-4 May 2008.

The event was a great success, providing the opportunity to talk about our work with new audiences, and introduce the EPE projects to those already familiar with our 'red volumes'. The event was attended

by over 12,000 people and our stand was inundated with visitors. We signed up lots of new recipients for *EPE News* and also sold a number of our paperbacks.

Professor John Beckett, Director of the VCH, gave a free seminar as part of the Society of Genealogists workshop sessions. Entitled 'Researching a parish history', the seminar gave family historians an insight into how our work can help them research unfamiliar locations, and understand how the history of a local area may have affected their ancestors' lives. The seminar proved to be very popular, with standing room only in the lecture theatre!

Explore provides free access to 1000s of local history resources including images, transcribed documents and audio files.
www.ExploreEnglandsPast.org.uk

"Olympia in London on a fairly sunny day in early May might not be everyone's idea of an enjoyable occasion but never-the-less it is obviously at the top of many a family historian's list. Obviously, because as a volunteer on the EPE/VCH stand at the 'Who Do You Think You Are?' fair, I was amazed at just how busy it was.

The stand promoting the EPE Explore site and other VCH resources, saw a steady stream of visitors. Some already knew about our work, most were impressed with what EPE and VCH could offer them. To my mind, certainly worth the effort.

To prove the reach of the event I met a fair number of people from my home county and even one person from where I work!"

Philip Cousins, Derbyshire volunteer



Volunteers start work on second Medway project

From the project manager

H.C. Hill & Son, High Street, Strood, c. 1920. Courtesy of MALSC



Since the last edition of *EPE News* our Web Manager, Andy Stokes, has left the project to relocate to the north-east. Andy has done some fantastic work on both the EPE and VCH websites and we wish him well for the future.

We are pleased to announce that the new Web Manager, Dmitri Nemchenko, and the new Education and Skills Manager, Skye Dillon, will join us during July.

Recently we have been busy organising and attending events. Our stand at the 'Who Do You Think You Are?' exhibition received such a good response that we'll be back next year. Thanks are due to those who worked so hard to populate the Explore website in advance and those who spent their bank holiday on the stall. We are continuing to promote the website in the media, and also by distributing bookmarks and mouse mats. Contact Mel if you'd like any promotional materials.

We also celebrated the launch of two more paperbacks. The Sunderland launch took place at the National Glass Centre in the city, with an enthusiastic speech from Michael Wood and songs by Peter Ryder. Particular thanks are due to Tony Pollard, Chair of Durham VCH Trust, for making the event such a success. The Burford book was launched at the prestigious location of The Great House, a private residence kindly opened to us by the owner, on a beautiful sunlit evening.



Drinks on the lawn at The Great House

Many of the volunteers for the new Kent project *The Medway Towns 1550-1900* are seasoned veterans of EPE, having worked with Andrew Hann for the past two years on *Life and Work in the Lower Medway Valley, 1750-1900*.

At a volunteer meeting on 22 May Sandra Dunster, the new Kent team leader, was delighted to discover that the enthusiasm of these volunteers was undiminished. Presented with an outline of the Medway Towns book and a list of potential research projects to tackle, they soon stepped up to offer their skills. New recruits were equally enthusiastic, quickly identifying where their interests lay and staking a claim for specific areas of research.

By the end of the session, plans had been made for a wide range of activities. Some agreed to tackle the transcription of census data and probate material. Businesses, clubs and societies were identified for investigation and offers were made to trawl the 19th century newspapers to seek material relating to health and crime. Work researching prisoners on the hulks along the Medway, an analysis of material relating to Medway on the Old Bailey website and an initial

survey of architectural features in Gillingham were promised. Many volunteers also expressed an interest in working up short biographies of famous and not-so-famous residents of the Medway Towns.

Two new recruits, Gina Baines and Vikki Clayton, offered to assist in loading new material onto the Kent EPE website, to ensure that all this new research is made available to the widest audience.

Several of those present also generously offered material they had already collected. Astrid Salmon had transcribed the diary of a governess in 19th century Brompton and Peter Lyons had trawled the records of Rochester Cricket club. Alan Watkins offered information about the early development of the dockyards at Chatham from research undertaken in the National Archives. Andrew Ashbee brought along a 19th century plan of Brompton Village and Brian Joyce offered to share his index of local newspapers.

In short, the Kent volunteers are a force to be reckoned with. Their enthusiasm for, and commitment to, the Medway Towns project bodes well for the continuation of EPE in the county.



Meet the team

Jessica Porter - VCH & EPE Production Assistant



Jessica Porter, Production Assistant

I graduated from the University of Leeds in 2002 with a BA (Hons) in Classical Civilisation. Since leaving Leeds I have worked for the British Council, BUPA and Central Saint Martins on major IT & Finance based projects as an administrator and latterly in student administration. I travelled around the world in 2004 stopping for six months in Canada to volunteer on a tiny gulf island which, fortunately, was bear free!

I am the Production Assistant for both EPE and VCH and I am relishing the variety and opportunity for further development (especially IT skills) that this role enables. No week is the same, it would seem! My main focus is to help Publications Manager, Kerry Whitston, to prepare copy for sending to our publishers. This includes sourcing, ordering, clearing copyright and working with images and liaising with our cartographers. I also work on our websites, helping to oversee, edit and upload content. I am the clerk for the Editorial Board and organise and clerk the VCH Annual Reviews.

I am currently studying for my MA in World History at Birkbeck and am thoroughly enjoying working on the EPE project, which blends academic history with education and outreach work as well as IT.

Better than Sudoku?

Following a series of introductory sessions on palaeography and the context of medieval documents, a dozen intrepid souls are now working as a group to transcribe a rental for the manor of Ledbury in the late 13th century. Herefordshire Archive Service allowed David Lovelace to photograph the document for us, so thanks to the wonders of modern technology the group can view the image on screen and work together on the transcript. This fascinating document has only been published in part before. Once completed, the transcript will be available on our Explore website.

The volunteers are thoroughly enjoying the challenge – it's better than Sudoku, says one! They are also enjoying learning about their predecessors in Ledbury. Some

occupied whole burgage plots, for which they paid 1s (5p) a year. Others had only half or even quarter plots, a few paying as little as 2d (1p) a year.

A great deal can be learnt from people's surnames at this time. Although 'frith' is a common place name, meaning woodland, it is likely that Walter de la Frith, who paid for a 1 ½ burgage plot, came from the very Frith area we have been studying. Occupations, too, can be deduced from surnames. Richard le Couter (cobbler) and Galfirdus Aurifaber (Geoffrey the Goldsmith) lived in the street known as the Southend. Matilda de Furges lived on the corner of the Southend and New Street. Her name can be translated as 'Matilda of the Crossroads'.

Trade secrets revealed on streets of Bristol

EPE Bristol Team Leader, Madge Dresser, is one of the writers involved in an exciting theatre project in Bristol.

Show of Strength Theatre Company's production, 'Trade it?', is a guided walk with a difference. Lost areas of the city will be brought to life through a series of 10 minute dramas, exploring the impact of trade on Bristol past and present.

Based on research completed for the EPE paperback 'Bristol: Ethnic Minorities and the City 1000-2001' Madge's drama looks at the history of Africans in 18th century Bristol. Other 'Trade it?' authors include writer and broadcaster Sandi Toksvig and playwright and historian Edson Burton. Edson was also involved in the EPE Bristol project, contributing a chapter on the post-war migration of African Caribbeans to the city.

Performances start on Tuesday 24 June and run until Sunday 6 July. Visit www.showofstrength.org.uk for further details.



The Bristol Corn Exchange, built 1741–43 by John Wood the Elder, today houses the offices of the former City Valuer's Department and market traders. For more information on the Exchange and trade in Bristol visit www.ExploreEnglandsPast.org.uk/Bristol



Local history tutors learn about Exmoor project



A (damp!) view of Dunster church

Spring was taken up with work on the Explore Exmoor site for the May launch at the 'Who Do You Think You Are?' exhibition. Since then efforts have concentrated on publicity for the site through posters and bookmarks and at local events such as the Somerset Heritage Roadshow at Glastonbury Abbey and the Royal Bath and West Show.

An opportunity to use EPE and VCH research came on 18-20 April when

the Conference of the Association of Local History Tutors was held at Dunster. The delegates are users and supporters of our work. The group concentrated on the history of Dunster and of southern Exmoor. On Saturday the group heard talks on memories of the 1952 flood disaster and on discovering the lives of the poor in southern Exmoor. They were taken on a tour of southern Exmoor, beginning with a brief visit to Dulverton to see

On the road in Cornwall

Having launched our first book, and handed in the text of the second, the pressure is off (slightly) here in Cornwall and we have found time to mount two exhibitions promoting both *'Cornwall and the Cross'* in particular, and VCH of Cornwall in general.

The first exhibition was mounted at St Austell Library during Local History Month. This venue was appropriate as we have recently begun a new initiative for volunteers, enabling them to receive microfiche training in their local libraries rather than having to go to the Cornish Studies Library in Redruth to do their research.

Our second exhibition was "the biggy", the Royal Cornwall Show at Wadebridge, which is visited by over 130,000 people during the three day event. VCH of Cornwall exhibited in the Heritage Marquee alongside Cornwall Record Office, the Cornwall Local History Society and Family History, to name but a few. We were honoured to receive a visit from the President and her party – a good photo opportunity.

The main feature was the launch of *'Cornwall and the Cross'* and the schools' project based on the book – both were greatly admired. We were also flagging up our next project. It was just one week before

the former workhouse, now the offices of the Exmoor National Park Authority.

We drove down a rough, and in places precipitous, track to Lyshwell, a remote Exmoor farm studied by the EPE volunteers. The weather was appalling but at least they saw what life on an Exmoor farm is really like for most of the year! The Exmoor sheep had only recently lambed and we admired the resilience of the tiny lambs. We continued to Molland for lunch and the chance to thaw and dry out before visiting the church with its rare survival of mid 18th-century furnishings and its splendid array of monuments. The fog had closed in further and it was decided to cut the tour short and return to Dunster, where most of the party explored the church with its medieval monuments and superb screen. On Sunday Hilary Binding took over and guided the group around Dunster's historic streets.

the HLF meeting to decide our fate. Sadly, our grant application was not approved so we are again on the fund raising trail. The project is very important to Cornwall, so continue to watch this space.

Lady Banham, President of Royal Cornwall Show visits the VCH stand





Michael Wood launches first County Durham paperback

(l to r) Christine Newnham, Michael Wood and Maureen Meikle



and appropriate venue, enjoying splendid views across the harbour and standing in close proximity to the site of the Anglo-Saxon monastery of Wearmouth which featured prominently in the book. Special guest was the historian and broadcaster Michael Wood, who wrote the foreword to the paperback. He spoke enthusiastically about the book's content, the educational importance of producing historical studies such as this and the valuable work done by the VCH and the EPE project.

Trust, together with other Trust members and supporters; the Vice Chancellor and members of staff of the University of Sunderland and staff from the University of Durham. David Miller, a member of the HLF committee for the north-east also attended, along with VCH and EPE central office and county staff.

The launch was held in conjunction with a fundraising event hosted by the Durham VCH Trust and, a splendid evening was had by all.

Our first County Durham paperback was launched in great style on the 30 April when 100 guests joined the Durham team in celebrating the publication of *'Sunderland and its Origins: Monks to Mariners'*.

The event was held at the National Glass Centre in Sunderland, which proved to be an impressive

A number of other prominent guests were in attendance, including Lord Barnard and Sir Paul Nicholson, Lord Lieutenant of Durham, both patrons of the Durham VCH Trust; the Mayor and Mayoress of Sunderland and a number of prominent members of Sunderland City Council; Professor Anthony Pollard, Chair of the Durham VCH

Mayor of Sunderland, Councillor Leslie Scott



Volunteer case study: Joan Mitchell, Cornwall

I am 83 and have lived in Cornwall since 1971. I am very interested in local and family history. At a talk at the University of the Third Age I heard about the project looking at religious sites. I just wanted to help so I offered to take some photographs of St Ewe church. It is a church in which I have attended many weddings and it was a pleasure to take some time to look closely at the building and to talk to the warden.

I visited the church a few times and each time I took a different friend who was interested in seeing it. I really enjoyed it and I was able to look at the building with fresh eyes. I am very enthusiastic and have an

enquiring mind. It is an enjoyable project and I'm looking forward to visiting another church.



One of Joan's photographs showing the south aisle of All Saints Church, St Ewe. For more images of the church visit www.ExploreEnglandsPast.org.uk/Cornwall

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