



*Beth, Rose and James spying out the landscape at Old Sodbury*

## Welcome from the Editor

Welcome to the third newsletter of the Gloucestershire County History Trust. There is much in this newsletter which shows that the Trust is now making good progress in publishing the results of research, both from our contracted historians and from our volunteers. You will read that Rose Wallis's VCH 'Short' on Yate is due for publication very soon and that she is now turning her attention to the Sodburys, which will also feature in Volume XIV. Volume XIII of the

big Red Books is passing into its final stages before publication and the first written fruits of Cheltenham have appeared in draft with those for Cirencester following shortly.

We hope you enjoy our news and the snippets from the archives for which no room can be found in the published volumes. Finally we have the second part of the Monumental Brass Society's conference in Cirencester last September and a reminder about the close links between the VCH and that other great work of reference – the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

An occasional newsletter for everyone involved in, or interested in, the progress of the Victoria County History towards its completion in Gloucestershire. The VCH Gloucestershire Academy is the name given to the editors and volunteers who work together researching and writing under the aegis of the Gloucestershire County History Trust. The Trust and the Academy are based at Gloucestershire Archives, Clarence Row, Alvin Street, Gloucester GL1 3DW

My thanks again go to all our contributors and to John Chandler, our county editor, for the production, and to Jonathan Comber, the Trust's treasurer, who has collated the various contributions for me. We hope you enjoy reading what follows. If you have any comments or further ideas please let me know: [dhaldred@btinternet.com](mailto:dhaldred@btinternet.com).

*David Aldred*  
Editor

## News from the Trust

### Are we nearly there yet?

A familiar refrain, and the answer is just the same as ever: not quite, can you hang on a bit longer? But I'm hoping that very soon, we shall be able to announce substantial progress on several fronts. The long-awaited Yate 'Short' by Rose Wallis is in the very final stages of production, and should be printed in August. We'll then be able to set up a proper launch, maybe in September, depending on various availabilities.

Then for Cheltenham, Alex Craven has delivered the bulk of his Early Modern section, and this will soon be followed by Beth Hartland's medieval sections on both Cheltenham and Cirencester. Interim draft sections already submitted have looked very promising, with new information abounding, but they all need to be reviewed by John Chandler, our county editor, before going on to the web. So, patience please, because John's own current focus is on completing the text of Twyning, the last element of Volume XIII. We then gear up for the pre-publication stages of the Red Book itself.

We're also waiting for one last but important piece of the medieval Cheltenham picture to fall into place, the manorial roll of 1275, held at the Duchy of Cornwall archives, which has been undergoing conservation by a top specialist who works for the British Library. She has successfully 'relaxed' and separated the thirteen sheets of vellum, which could not previously be examined, and has carried out necessary repairs; and we're hoping that images of the manuscript now revealed will be available for study soon. The repair has been quite a technical feat and once it's all completely finished and written up, both

we and the Duchy are hoping it can be used to generate some good publicity. So there's quite a lot happening behind the scenes, and come the autumn we should be enjoying a good harvest.

Finally we send our best wishes to Alex and Claire on their recent marriage and to Rose on gaining her PhD for her thesis 'The relationship between magistrates and their communities in the age of crisis: social protest c.1790-1834'.

*James Hodsdon*  
Chairman, GCHT

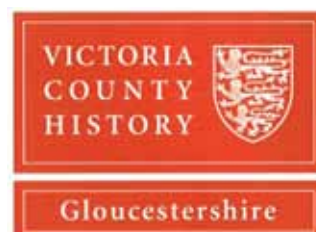
## News from the County Editor

### Volume XIII: Vale of Gloucester

We received back at the end of March the outside reviewer's report on the volume (apart from Twyning) and, much to my relief, this was generally favourable. Most of the points raised can be remedied without too much additional work. John Juřica and Simon Draper, who have written four parishes each, have both seen the report and are adjusting their work. By the time you read this, I'll have pretty well finished Twyning, and will be pulling the whole volume together for submission at the end of July. That is not the end of the story, of course. Maps and images, proofreading and indexing lie ahead, but all being well we should be able to launch and celebrate a new Red Book early in 2016.

### Volume XVI: Cirencester and its Surroundings

Beth Hartland has to date written over 17,000 words in draft covering many aspects of the medieval town, including its manors, religious history, charities and the poor, and aspects of borough government, its gaol and the town's place in national politics and history. This represents



a very significant achievement, and we are well on the way to having an authoritative history of medieval Cirencester on which to build our accounts of the earlier and later periods.

Antonia Catchpole, with Linda Viner, has continued to work with dedicated volunteers, so that – as well as a great deal of reading and noting of documentary sources – pieces of text have now been emerging or are promised shortly, on railways, the Royal Agricultural University, almshouses, charities, education and families. We are also sharing volunteers with the Gloucestershire Archives' project to catalogue the extensive archives of the Cirencester solicitors Sewell, Mullings and Logie, led by Hannah Dale.

### **Amo, Amas, Amat**

The Gloucestershire Archives' focus group suggested some time ago that it would be useful to start a Latin for Local History self-help group, commencing with a little tuition. Several of our members agreed and so, initially for academy volunteers only, we held a session on a Monday in April and repeated it with some feedback during the May academy day. The TNA website has two excellent self-tutoring Latin courses, for beginners and the more advanced, and the main aim was to introduce the beginners' course and set researchers off to work on it at their own pace. A similar session will be offered to other archives' users who do not volunteer for the VCH, and then we shall try to hold occasional, perhaps, regular, self-help group meetings where we can work on Latin documents.



*The Latin group at the May academy day*

### **Academy Days**

We gave January a miss, as the proposed date seemed to catch up on us too soon after the Christmas break, but subsequently we have met monthly, usually with an attendance of around twenty. In February we were very pleased to welcome Richard Hoyle, recently appointed Director of the VCH, to introduce himself and discuss his plans for the project's future; also Rose Hewlett, a well-known historian locally who led a useful workshop on house history. Our April gathering was also special, as we paid a visit to Cirencester – 'study tour' is not too grand a description – and explored the town, park and church, under the omniscient guidance of Linda Viner. Our June meeting, with Adam Chapman from VCH Central Office, concentrated on writing for the VCH, and we were pleased to welcome colleagues from Herefordshire. We have also held workshop sessions on sources for travel, and for archaeology (by Anna Morris of the Gloucestershire Archaeology Service), and on local newspapers.

We have plans to continue meeting on the third Thursday of each month, including perhaps a visit to Cheltenham in the autumn. If and when Gloucestershire Archives' 'For the Record' development programme begins next year (which Kate Maisey introduced us to at our June meeting) our day will probably switch to Monday, and we are grateful to her and her colleagues for offering to continue making the Frith Centre available to us during the period of restricted service and accommodation.

### **Yate 'Short'**

The corrections have been made, the index compiled, and the final proofs of our first VCH 'Short' paperback are now back with Central Office, ready for the book to be printed. We hope to have copies in August and are planning a launch in Yate soon afterwards – we shall make sure that everyone knows when. This represents a great achievement for the book's author, Rose Wallis (shortly to be **Dr** Rose Wallis – another great achievement), a highly satisfactory outcome for the whole



VCH Gloucestershire project, and cause for much celebration in Yate itself.

*John Chandler*

*Postscript from our treasurer*

### **Yate 'Short' launch**

As you will have read in John's piece above, the Yate 'Short' will be published in the next two or three months. It is intended that we shall have a formal launch at Yate Heritage Centre and a date will be arranged once we have a better idea of when the book will be available. If you think you would either like to attend the launch or buy a copy, please let me know, preferably by e-mail to [Jonathan.Comber@easynet.co.uk](mailto:Jonathan.Comber@easynet.co.uk) or by phone on 01684-577134. The book will be on sale at £12, with a special price for VCH Glos academy volunteers.



*St Mary's medieval parish church from Rowe's guide to Cheltenham, 1850*

## News on Volume XV

We are now close to having a complete draft of the history of the parish of Cheltenham before the year 1738. Consisting of the work of professional historians and of a committed group of volunteers from the local community, our work draws upon a wider range of source material than has ever previously been used, in particular the archives of the Duchy of Cornwall. These drafts concern the ancient parish of Cheltenham, made up of the tithings of Cheltenham, Arle, Alstone, and Westal, Sandford and Naunton. The remaining parishes that made up the ancient hundred of Cheltenham – Charlton Kings, Leckhampton, and Swindon – will be treated separately in the future.

Medievalist Beth Hartland's draft, comprising almost 20,000 words, details the history of Cheltenham from the Anglo-Saxon period up until 1539, when Syon Abbey, the owner of the manor, was dissolved by Henry VIII. The earliest documented part of the parish was Arle which lay on a drove route to Gloucester. Cheltenham's growth may have been due to its proximity to a network of other

local and regional roads. Cheltenham had a mixed economy: both rural and urban. In the pre-Black Death period, the lords of the manor farmed the demesne (or grange) directly, as was typical; by the later fourteenth century the demesne was largely leased out. Woodland was cleared to make way for pasture, but timber remained an important and guarded resource. In fifteenth- and sixteenth-century leases of the manors of both Cheltenham and Redgrove, the lords of the respective manors reserved all rights to the trees and undergrowth of the wooded areas to themselves. Cheltenham supported a range of crafts and industries: the needs of the manor for plough shares and other agricultural tools, as well as tiles, nails and slates could be met by the town, and the bailiff at Cheltenham sourced such items for the manor of Slaughter too (which was held in conjunction with the manor of Cheltenham from 1246). Fulling mills made an appearance in Cheltenham in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.

The draft by early modernist Alex Craven carries the story forward from 1539 until 1738, and throws important new light on the manorial history of Cheltenham. Following the dissolution of Syon Abbey in 1539, Cheltenham was leased



by the Crown to a succession of local families, the Lignons, the Norwoods, and the Packers, all of whom sought to use possession of the manor to their personal advantage. Numerous allegations of corruption finally resulted in a major survey of the manor in 1617, incidentally giving us a detailed view of Cheltenham.

The survey highlighted abuses by many of the residents as well, who insisted that the sums they owed to the Crown as landowner were fixed at the medieval rate, worth little after centuries of inflation. After several years of conflict, the Crown was able to force its interpretation upon residents by the expedient of refusing to confirm their estates unless they accepted its right to fix higher rents. It was this pressure from the Crown, more than local concerns about the archaic custom of 'Borough-English', which led to the famous Act of Parliament of 1625. By the final agreement, the Crown agreed to fix the entry fines according to the medieval rent in return for the payment of a single large sum by the residents. With the future revenues from the manor fixed at a low value by this arrangement, it is not surprising either that Charles I sold the manor shortly afterwards, nor that the new owners, the Duttons, promptly set about recouping their investment by selling off freehold land.

The next phase of research is now under way. It will take in the most crucial period of Cheltenham's modern history, beginning in 1738 with the commercial exploitation of the spa, and culminating in 1852 with the appointment of Improvement Commissioners to manage the town. The projection of Cheltenham to the height of British society after the visit of George III to the spa had several important consequences which changed the face of the town forever. Grand buildings were erected in the high street, new fashionable estates sprang up to the north and south of the town, and the railways arrived in the town. The population explosion of the early nineteenth century necessitated new schools and parish churches, and the creation of a local police force. In 1832 the town gained its first MP as a result of the Great Reform Act. These issues and many others will be examined in detail over the next year.

*Alex Craven*

## Work begins on the Sodburys

Work began on the next phase of Volume XIV this spring. Beth Hartland and I will be tackling the pre- and post-Reformation histories of Old, Little, and Chipping Sodbury parishes. In April, we spent a day conducting fieldwork in the three parishes with John Chandler (ably assisted by my son James – our youngest VCH volunteer!)

Protected from extensive twentieth century development that changed the face of neighbouring Yate, much of the Sodburys' history remains obvious in its landscape. We began in the small village settlement of Little Sodbury, nestled beneath its prehistoric fort. Contained by double ramparts and a defensive ditch, the fort straddles the boundary between Old and Little Sodbury on its eastern periphery. Travelling west across Sodbury common, we spent a productive afternoon exploring the market town of Chipping Sodbury, founded by 1179. Much of the town's medieval layout is still evident in its physical arrangement and architecture, as is its continued commercial character, tending to the needs of travellers for centuries in its numerous hostelries. We were fortunate enough to take a tour up the town's church tower; standing for more than five hundred years (much to James' relief!) it afforded panoramic views of the area. The nonconformist heritage of the Sodburys is likewise reflected in its urban centre: the Friends' meeting house, built in 1692, as well as the chief of three Baptist chapels in the area, and the Catholic Church and presbytery, can all be found in the town. We concluded our trip at Old Sodbury. Its church, parent to St John's at Chipping Sodbury, returned us to the settlements' earliest origins: the twelfth century building incorporates masonry purported to date from the Saxon era. The trip proved invaluable in understanding the topography of the settlements and physical clues to their development. The project promises to be an exciting one, rich in its diversity.

I am also pleased to report that an intern will be supporting the



Sodbury editors over the summer. Thanks to the generous sponsorship of the University of the West of England, Karl Keating, a talented third-year history student studying at the university, will be working with me on aspects of the modern history of the Sodburys from July.

Rose Wallis

## Sally's Teas and Talks

Sally Self, our indefatigable volunteer researcher and co-ordinator for Cheltenham, has now organised three Teas and Talks to raise funds for the Trust. Dr Steven Blake, the well-known Cheltenham historian, started the ball rolling with a talk based on his book *A History of Cheltenham in 100 Objects*. Professor Emeritus Tom James of the University of Winchester followed with a talk on 'Mary Seacole, a Jamaican Nurse in the Crimean War' and most recently Heather Forbes, County Archivist, spoke on 'Discovering Old Music in the Archives'. The talks, of course, are just the icing on the cake, for Sally's teas are highly recommended. The



Heather talking about old music

trustees are extremely grateful that Sally has already raised £1,000 for the funds. Thank you Sally.

Editor

## From the Archives

### Jarndyce versus Jarndyce – in Chancery: cataloguing at the Archives

Even if one has not read *Bleak House*, most of us will have seen the television serial of that name or know of the protracted and convoluted case, and which when finally solved left nothing for the Jarndyce children. While cataloguing at the Archives, our Group have had their patience tried by not one but two similar Chancery cases: the Attorney General versus Corpus Christi College, Oxford, 1816 to c.1860 and Pitt versus Pitt, 1840s to 1860.

The first case, by the '*relators* (informants) *and inhabitants of Cheltenham*' against the Oxford college, centres on the mis-management of the Pate Charity estates. The majority of the land and premises were in Cheltenham, with five more in Gloucester and the Leigh farm. The foundation was started by Richard Pate in 1574, as a charitable act that was assisted by Queen Elizabeth, for the establishing of a Free Grammar School and hospital (almshouse) for the children and the poor of Cheltenham. The first rumblings of concern were expressed at a Vestry meeting in January 1816, when it was noted that the returns from the Estate needed to be increased. Complaints multiplied over the next decades: the salaries of the master and usher (assistant master), dependent on the numbers in the school, were incorrect; their behaviour left much to be desired; the buildings were in a decayed state; the curriculum did not answer the needs of the nineteenth century; other town schools were achieving better results.

The vestry's education committee, in conjunction with other townspeople, desired to reform the situation and to 'maximise the revenue stream', while Corpus Christi seem to have employed delaying tactics. Efforts were made to conclude it in



31 Plough Hotel

Mullens Exp

Oct 30 Paper & wax	2-8
Sherry	1-
8 Dinners	3-4-
<del>ale</del>	2-6
Port	1-6-
Sherry	12-
Moselle	8-
Claret	10-6
Dessert	7-
Tea & coffee	10-6
Wax light & fire	2-6
31 8 Dinners	3-4-
ale	2-
Sherry	12-
Old Port	1-6-
Madeira	16-
Claret	10-6
Dessert	7-
Tea & coffee	10-6
Wax light & fire	2-6
Paper	- 4
Rooms for Sale	
Fire Station	" " "
Fire Alarm	" " "
Coffee Room Bill	14 <sup>11</sup> Qu. 6
	17. 6
Waiter	15. 7. 0
Chambermaid	1. 10. 0
Beer	2. 6

1826, but it still continued with varying levels of acrimony for another 34 years. The view we are getting is undoubtedly one sided, as we are cataloguing the documents that remained in the town, eventually to form part of the Ticehurst and Wyatt accession, now housed in D2025, boxes 49 – 51. The other side of the case appears in *Tudor Foundation, A Sketch of the History of Richard Pate's Foundation in Cheltenham*, Arthur Bell, 1974.

The second case, arose from the bankruptcy of Joseph Pitt and was caused by his attempts to realise his aspiration to found a rival township to Cheltenham. He re-mortgaged, and apparently indulged in 'creative accounting' using his other substantial estates as securities. His holdings included the Eastcourt estate, near Cirencester, the manor and hundred of Cricklade, lands at Minety and other lesser property in Gloucestershire, Worcestershire and Somerset, as well as his assets in Cheltenham and Prestbury, freehold, copyhold and leasehold premises, shops and valuable building plots. There were also the tolls on several local turnpiked roads. It is a difficult case to follow: confusingly there are three Joseph Pitts – Joseph Pitt, of Pittville, who died in February 1842, Joseph Pitt the younger, who became the Revd. Joseph Pitt of Lichfield, and Joseph Pitt, the son of Revd. Cornelius Pitt of Rendcomb. The claims of the creditors, which included the Gardners and the Agg Gardners of Cheltenham, Mullings of Cirencester and the Gloucester County Bank, extended the case until 1890 and fills up boxes 60 to 66!

While the majority of the documents are long, however (and dare it be said rather tedious), there are lighter moments. Recently a bill was found for the expenses of two nights' lodging and board at the *Plough Hotel*, Cheltenham, 30 and 31 October 1843. Eight people sat down to dinner at a total cost of £6: each dinner cost about 7s. 6d.; however the alcohol – ale, sherry, madeira, moselle and 'old port' – came to £7 14s. 2d.; desserts to 14s.; teas and coffees £1 8s. 6d.; wax lights and fire, 5s. Tips were included,



but the only one paid appears to have been to the waiter of £1. The tips for the chamber maid of 2s. and to the boots for 2s. 6d. were crossed out! The total bill was £16 7s., of which James Randolph Mullings paid half share!

*Sally Self*

## Fulling in Cheltenham Manor

There were two fulling mills on Cheltenham manor; one at Sandford and one at Cudnall. Both probably originated as corn mills and were converted to fulling (or fulling and corn) in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. The Sandford mill was first recorded as a fulling mill in c.1440. Then, and in later surveys, it was in joint ownership. The mill at Cudnall appears to have been converted to fulling in 1417/18. Having come into the Sir John Cornwall's hand as an escheat, it was let at a reduced rent to Robert Walker for the term of his life on condition that he build a fulling mill with two stocks called 'Wallyng Stockes' and a house with five bays above the mill. Robert was to pay the lord £10 if he failed to do this, the lord having agreed to find reasonable timber for the enterprise. Under the lordship of the abbess and convent of Syon the mill was included in the bailiff's charge (*onus bailli*).

*Beth Hartland*

## Gone but not Forgotten?

Nothing unusual about finding monumental inscriptions in a parish collection. Phillipps and Bigland collected them, and recording them has long been one of the staple projects of family history societies. But had I looked more carefully at the catalogue entry for Gloucestershire Archives P343 MI 2/1, I would have spotted that the memorial to Mary Roberts in the miscellaneous section of Twyning parish records was not a transcript on a piece of paper, as one might expect it



(P343 MI 2/1. Courtesy of Gloucestershire Archives)

to be – but the inscription itself, on a slab of stone, about eight inches by five, done up in bubblewrap and tied with archivist's tape. Shaped like a miniature tombstone it was the sort of memorial one finds in pets' cemeteries, but the inscription suggested that it was not for someone's favourite cat: 'In Loving Memory of Mary Roberts who died Oct 17 1894 aged 65 years. Gone but not forgotten'.

So who was Mary, why such a small monument, and – more to the point – why was her gravestone kept in the parish chest? No-one of that name was buried in Twyning churchyard in 1894, in fact no Mary Roberts of that age was buried anywhere in England or Wales in October 1894. I would welcome other suggestions (or to know of similar artefacts), but I can only think that the stone was a sample, deposited with the vicar by a local undertaker or stonemason to advertise for business. 'Gone but not forgotten' – apparently she never even existed!

*John Chandler*





## Cirencester Methodism

I have been going through some of the records held in the Gloucestershire archives relating to the Cirencester Methodist circuit. One thing I noticed which I had not expected was that there was criticism given by one person maintaining the Circuit schedule book in the mid-nineteenth century about the records left by his predecessor. It appears that a brother only held the role for a short period and it was then passed on to another brother. This happened on two or three occasions and one instance of the words recorded is noted below:

I very much regret that Mr Marsh has not kept the Circuit accounts more orderly and correctly. If all the preachers were as indifferent in these matters what would be the state of the connexions Dec 11th 1840 Brother Stevens

Underneath is written

Here ends the Chapter of Complaints against poor Brother Marsh I very much regret that Mr Stevens should have made so many of his remarks in this book. If all the preachers were so censorious, what would be the state of our Schedule Books. Dec 11th 1843. J Nevill.

*Jonathan Comber*

## Monumental Brass Society Cirencester Study Day, Sat. 27 September 2014 Part 2

*Continued from Newsletter 2, January 2015*

After lunch it was the turn of Sally Badham, a stalwart of the Society, who spoke about 'Three Cirencester merchants, their brasses and commemorative strategies'. Miss Badham discussed the many and varied religious guilds in Cirencester – The Holy Trinity or Weavers' Guild, the Guilds of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St Thomas the Martyr, the Name of Jesus, St Clement, St John the Baptist – along with the seven altars, five chantries, one torch and eleven lights in the church which were supported financially by the townspeople. She suggested that the number of religious guilds

in Cirencester is unusual and may relate to the absence of a guild merchant. The paper then went on to detail the commemorative strategies of three medieval merchants and their families: Robert Pagge (d. 1440), Reginald Spycer and John Bennett (d. 1497).

Robert Pagge's brass in the Trinity Chapel commemorates his life and that of his wife Margaret and fourteen children. He stands on a woolpack on which is stencilled his merchant mark. Miss Badham identified Trinitarian iconography on the brass to indicate his membership of the guild, while the inscription reflected the good he did in his lifetime, relieving the poor, building and repairing churches and roads. The brass of much-married Reginald Spycer (1442) which is also in the Trinity chapel, is conventional in inscription and lacks religious iconography (*see overleaf*). However the dresses and veils of his four wives are all different, reflecting the fashions of their individual lifetimes and illustrating the order in which they married and died. His surviving widow, Joan, who is thought to have commissioned the brass, has the best outfit of the four! While the brass itself gives little information about the Spycers, Joan's will includes generous bequests to many of the lights in the church as well as for daily masses for her soul in Cirencester and Oxford, along with gifts to churches and institutions beyond the town, ensuring that she would be remembered and prayed for by a large number of people. The brass of John Bennett and his two wives (1497) is in the Lady Chapel, though may have started out in the Trinity Chapel, and contains more religious iconography than the previous two along with Bennett's merchant mark. Bennett is known to have left money towards the new porch, for churches elsewhere in the county including Rodborough and Minchinhampton, and to the three orders of friars in Gloucester.

In conclusion, it appears that the prayers of worthy, church-going folk were very important in speeding the passage of a person's soul through purgatory. In order to accrue as many prayers as possible, medieval merchants and their families did as much as they could to raise their profiles through monumental brasses, good deeds, obits, lights and masses. They might even buy





*Reginald Spycer (d. 1442) and his four wives: Margaret, Julian, Margaret and Joan (from C.T. Davis, Monumental Brasses of Gloucestershire (1899) Fig. 42)*

the attendance and prayers of the worthy poor at their funerals, as Agnes Bennett did, by leaving money for cloth for twelve poor people. The cloth would have been made into cloaks or other clothing for the recipients, and every time they were worn, would serve to remind the wearer of their benefactor, encouraging even more prayers. The commemorative strategies of the medieval merchant families illustrate the way that piety (and a degree of healthy self-interest) underlay everything they did, both before and after their deaths, to ensure their place in Heaven.

Finally, Peter Fleming, professor of history at UWE, spoke on ‘Commemoration at Cirencester and the later Medieval Gentry’, his paper revolving around the Epiphany Rising of 1400. In 1399 Henry IV had replaced Richard II as King of England, prompting a number of English nobles to attempt a rebellion against him. The ringleaders, the earls of Salisbury, Huntingdon and Kent, Thomas le Despenser of Gloucester, the earl of Rutland, Ralph Lumley, Sir Thomas Blount and Sir

<sup>1</sup> Norwich apparently heard about the plot from a prostitute, whose previous client had been one of the conspirators.

Bernard Brocas had planned to seize Henry at a tournament in Windsor, but were betrayed by Edward of Norwich and fled to the west of England.<sup>1</sup> The conflict came to a head on 6 January in Cirencester when the townspeople blockaded the rebels in their lodgings at the Ram Inn, then held them in the abbey until they could be presented to the king. A supporter of the Ricardian faction is said to have started a fire in the town in an attempt to create a diversion and allow them to escape, but the ruse was rumbled by the townspeople who summarily executed the conspirators in the market place and threatened Lord Berkeley, attending on the king’s behalf, if he tried to stop them. Prof Fleming, however, suggested that Berkeley might have encouraged the mob and instigated the beheadings as the townspeople had behaved most properly before his arrival; it might also have suited the king to have the conspirators lynched – his hands remained clean while his problem was removed.



The execution of the gentry by the lesser sort was usually condemned in the strongest terms, but in this case Henry IV rewarded the men of Cirencester – he took the town into his own hands and out of the grip of the abbey, and presented the townspeople with the goods and chattels of the conspirators *except* for their gold and silver. The townspeople were most reluctant to hand over the treasure, so in November 1400 the king visited Cirencester in an attempt to recover the riches, to no avail, and finally in December 1403 he pardoned the men of the town and granted them the booty. Before this, in July 1403 the king also issued a charter granting a guild merchant to be set up in the town (rescinded in 1413/15). In doing so the king acknowledged the existence of a borough at Cirencester but warned that the abbey's interests were not to be harmed by the new status. These acts of the king in the early years of the fifteenth century mark the only time in the town's history when the abbey's interests were not upheld by the crown, and it is clear that the king's actions were taken in relation to the services rendered to his cause by the townsmen.

Although no names of the leaders of the mob are recorded, it is possible that many of Cirencester's leading inhabitants were involved in the negotiations with the crown in 1400. Among these may have been William Nottingham, Richard Dixon and William Prelatte, commemorated by brasses in the church. Dixon was a staunch Yorkist and Prelatte as his executor is likely to have shared his politics. Both brasses have Yorkist symbolism, and as benefactors of the Trinity Chapel their influence may also have encouraged Yorkist emblems such as the falcon and fetterlock, to be incorporated into its design.

*Antonia Catchpole*

## The On-line Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

Members of the Bristol & Gloucestershire Archaeological Society and of the Cheltenham Local History Society may

remember the talks given by Mark Curthoys, one of the research editors of the On-line *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, on people linked with Gloucester and Cheltenham whose lives are described in the ODNB.

In the October 2014 issue of *The Local Historian* there is an article by Mark Curthoys commemorating the ODNB's tenth anniversary. Readers of the VCH Newsletter may like to know about the article because it draws attention to the VCH, in two respects particularly. He points to the long-standing link between DNB and VCH. The VCH itself was projected just as publication of the great 63-volume DNB was nearing completion, and initially was going to assign to each county's first volume 'Persons eminent in Art, Literature, Science'.

With no electronic index to aid in the discovery of the biographies of such people relevant to each parish in a county, the task was allocated by the general editor, William Page, to the VCH's new recruits, who were tasked with indexing place-names on half-foolscap slips of paper which could be sorted into alphabetical order. Mark Curthoys described in his talks how the search facilities in the ODNB can be used to provide an amazing list of interesting characters associated in some way with a particular place. Every VCH researcher knows this, but the richness of the source is only just being appreciated by local historians.

A further link with the VCH is made in referring to the life of Ethel Stokes, who organised a regional network of seven hundred volunteers to prevent the indiscriminate destruction of historical records in order to provide pulp for paper-making. Local history could have been considerably restricted if such a policy had been implemented. VCH volunteers are thus more integral to the VCH's past than might be appreciated at first glance.

There is a third link which is that the current director of the Institute of Historical Research (which is the part of the University of London that the national office of the VCH sits within), Professor Lawrence Goldman, was immediately prior to taking up this post the Editor of the ODNB.

*Anthea Jones*



## Red Volumes Available at a Discounted Price !!

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