

Herefordshire Archives Forum

Notes of Meeting

held on 4 July 2011

at Herefordshire Record Office

Present

Mark Robinson, Janet Robinson, Barry Lawrence (Much Cowarne History Group), Diana Kelly (Bromyard and District Local History Society), Heather Hurley (Ross Civic Society), Joan Prosser (Cradley Heritage Group), Mal Mason (Eardisley History Group), Barbara Ferris (Dinedor Heritage Group), Lauren Price (Herefordshire Libraries), Sue Knox (Museum Development Officer), Rhys Griffith (Herefordshire Archive Service).

Apologies

Jeff White (Cradley Heritage Group), Brian Smith (Golden Valley Research Group), Ian Standing and Irene Orchard (Archive of Cider Pomology), Mari Nowell, Ann Abbotts (Wellington Heath Archive Group), Sylvia Pinches (Victoria County History), Dave Tristram (Herefordshire Council Project Development), David Clark (Fownhope History Group), Sue Hubbard (Weobley Local History Society, etc), Jenny Houston (Longtown Historical Society)

1. Shops and shopping: the value of records for local history. John Harrison's academic career included the teaching of town development history in India and at the University of London. He has a particular interest in the wider social history value of retail archives. John began his presentation with a question about the group's own shopping habits and what they can reveal about our own lives. Shops have always been at the centre of society and yet their records generally seem to be overlooked. John cited the relatively few available collections at the Record Office as evidence of this. To illustrate how the records can bring the past to life, John described how he had found that the first daily task of any shop was to water the horses. He has been making contact with representatives of shops in Hereford to establish what, if any, records they have. He has spoken to Maurice Jones, owner of Philip Morris, John Chadd and Chave and Jackson. Survival of records is mixed, but he has gleaned some interesting information on the history of the shops.

John has studied in detail one item in particular that he has been able to borrow from Pritchards the tailors of Hereford. This is a ledger for the period 1897-1913, which tells us not only about the business practices of the firm, but also a great deal about its clients. Pritchard's, then as now, had a reputation for exclusiveness and was consistently patronised by the best families of the county. John's detailed analysis of the ledger has revealed that they included 50 members of the high gentry, squirearchy and church. These customers tended not to have outfits made from scratch but were rather,

using Pritchard's to carry out alterations. Most of the bespoke work would have been done in London. Professionals, including solicitors and doctors, were also included as clients. As John put it: property, souls, bodies and minds in descending order. There were also shopkeepers on the books: greengrocers, manure manufacturers, publicans.

Very little seems to have been paid over the counter and the ledger records an elaborate system of credit. Among the 1000 or so customers, there were some 30 defaulters. These were dealt with in a sensitive and circumspect manner. Nonetheless, the firm did enter into correspondence with non payers who were occasionally based overseas – even as far afield as India. Letters filed in the ledger show that the services of the London Association for the Protection of Trade were called upon. Most cases were discreetly dropped but one, involving a local artist, was pursued to the end, no doubt in order to make an example.

John demonstrated how this outwardly daunting volume and retail records in general can reveal the complex web of interactions that drove society in the past. It was a gripping talk.

2. Marking the anniversary of the First World War. Rhys spoke about a plan by Herefordshire Council Cultural Services to mark the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War in 2014. At the core of the project will be the digitisation of the Hereford Times for 1914-1918 by Hereford Library. This will be made available on the internet. There will also be a significant outreach and education element and potential for volunteers to play a role in activities such as researching relevant sources at the Record Office. It is hoped that local history groups would be able to participate and Mal Mason suggested that an outcome could be a county wide database of Herefordshire soldiers killed in action. Rhys will keep the Forum informed of developments in the project.

3. Archive Forum Next Steps. David Clark is currently occupied with the latest Fownhope book but will continue to explore the possibility of a directory of speakers after the book is published later in the year.

4. What's going on? – News from the local history societies

Ross Civic Society – Heather described how the Society continues to look for new material for its Pink Publications after the launch last year of its second anthology. The Society is involved in a project *The Way to The Wye* which is marking the 40th anniversary of the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It also organised the recent Georgian day in Ross where participants dressed in 18th century costume.

Friends of Herefordshire Record Office Heather is chair of the Friends and used the opportunity to distribute the new glossy membership leaflet with colour photographs. The AGM of the Friends was held at Broadfield Court and included a talk by Rhys on its history. On 18 September there will be a

riverside walk at Ross and there will be a winter quiz at the Record office on 5 December.

Cradley Heritage Group The group was invited by the Bromyard society to contribute to an exhibition based on the 1911 census. Interesting information has been found in the school log books of Storridge. Following some publicity, a photograph of the headmaster at the time came to light. The records of Storridge WI, which are held locally, are proving to be a fascinating source of information.

Dinedor Heritage Group The Heritage Lottery bid for enhancing elements of the Rotherwas site was, sadly, unsuccessful. The group will resubmit the bid to include a greater involvement of schools. A fund raising effort to win match funding has been launched. Details of this will be made available on the internet circular historical landscape walk on 7 August.

Hereford Library Lauren introduced herself as the new local studies librarian. Her immediate task is to go through the holdings, disposing of items that should be held elsewhere appropriately. Both the Record Office and Museum have received material as a result.

Eardisley History Group Malcolm reported on the very successful Big Dig that had recently taken place at the castle and that has been covered by the press. In the small area that was excavated the archaeologists, with considerable volunteer support, found some 70 different contexts represented with about 20 different floor levels. Some 500 pieces of pottery were found and, significantly, fragments of metal slag which indicated the presence of iron works – a rarity in English castles. The date range suggested by the pottery was limited to the 12th - 13th centuries. Further analysis of the finds is currently taking place. Malcolm paid particular tribute to the effective and accessible way the project was managed by Herefordshire Archaeology.

Museum Development Officer Sue made an appeal for any group wishing to participate in next year's Heritage Open Day to contact her by May 2012. Exhibitions and walks, etc can also be included. An exhibition featuring Thomas Andrew Knight, the horticulturalist of Downton Castle, is at the Cider Museum until October. Sue is interested in information about TA Knight and his work.

Much Cowarne History Group The publication on the Bournes of Cowarne Court will be launched at an open day in July. Members of the Bourne family from across the world will be present. A toll board from the 1840s toll house is currently being renovated and will be displayed in the church when completed.

Bromyard and District Local History Society The archaeology group will be investigating the manor at Bredenbury in September with the aid of the county archaeologist. The aim of the project, which is funded with a £10,000 grant, is to establish the origins of the manor. The new exhibition, Bromyard and District in 1911, was launched at the Bromyard gala with an Edwardian tea.

The society is running a well received family history workshop on Saturdays at £5 per participant. In September David Whitehead will lead a six week course on Herefordshire in the Dark Ages.

Herefordshire Archive Service The Record Office is closed for two weeks so that records can be cleaned, repackaged and moved to the out store at Churchill House. This is in order to satisfy the requirements of the National Archives following an inspection. A major programme aimed at cleaning and repackaging the collection of many thousands of wills is also under way. This is involving a large number of volunteers.

Date of next meeting: Monday 7 November 2011, 2pm