

Autumn 2021

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Welcome to the PLHS newsletter 2021.

At long last we are beginning to return to some kind of normality, albeit somewhat different and rather more cautious than what we used to know. The committee trusts that you have kept safe and healthy and are looking forward to resuming the indoor meetings which provide an opportunity to hear more about our fascinating village and meeting up with like minded folks.

Some research work has continued but understandably at a much reduced rate during the last couple of years. One notable acquisition is the digital copies of the Enclosure maps for the village, an artefact that has long eluded us. These maps provide a fascinating glimpse into the fields, land holdings and characters of the time. I am sure one of our researchers will be presenting this information at a meeting in the future.



Talks & Events

Your committee have continued meeting throughout the year and have begun the enjoyable task of organising indoor meetings once again. We are still finalising details for the 2022 programme but I can give details for the winter and into spring.

October 25th A Day at the Races - Speaker: Peter McNeil

November 22nd History of the Prestbury United Charities – Speaker: Tony Noel

December No meeting

January 24th The Scouts and Prestbury – Speaker: David Lyle

February 28th Prestbury & Pittville – Speaker: Steven Blake

March 28th AGM followed by Inns and Traffic in the Coaching Age – Speaker: Nicholas Herbert

A note from our Chairman

Dear Members,

The committee was delighted that so many of you supported our first presentation of the 2021 Winter series. Book sales were good and it was pleasant to welcome Joanne Wheldon from the village stores who have continued to sell our history books during the pandemic.

For many years there were few publications which specialised with Prestbury.

In the 1950's Norah Cossens produced the first detailed study in "A Short history of Prestbury Village". Later in 1987 Florence E Jackson a local author on a number of subjects, produced "A Portrait of Prestbury". Both of these books are now long out of print. Copies of Florence's book have appeared for sale on line. During this period Beryl Elliott contributed many well researched articles on Prestbury to the Cheltenham Local History Society Journal. Not sure of the date but the WI produced "Prestbury Our Heritage" an architectural Survey an excellent look at the buildings in the village. There used to be a copy held in the Library. The Parish Council published "Twentieth Century Memories of Prestbury in Gloucestershire" compiled by Jo Grimster and Carole Powell assisted by Kate Bishop. As the title says, village people talking about their experiences living here.

So, for many of us it was good when, Roger Beecham, Michael Cole and Norman Baker leading members of our Society began the current series of books on the history of our village. This now includes three volumes of Prestbury Past and Present, A walk through time, Southam and Prestbury, The Court Rolls of the Manor of Prestbury by Norman Baker assisted by Michelle Rees and my own slim volume on our late lamented Post Office. Opportunities perhaps for Christmas presents?

If you are carrying out any research we would be delighted to hear from you. We look forward to seeing you at our next presentation in the WI hall.

Tony Noel

The Burgage and Prestbury Fair and Market

John Leland visited Gloucestershire in 1542. In his journal he describes Prestbury as “a pleasant little town. It is alleged by some that long ago it used to be a chartered market town and its market was revived some twenty years ago”. Interesting that the fair which started in 1249 may have lapsed but that attempts were made to revive the market in about 1520.

The Burgage, the widest street in the village is thought to have been made large enough to be the site of the of a weekly market and a yearly fair held under a charter obtained from Henry 111 by Peter D’Aquablanca, who was Bishop of Hereford from 1240-1268.

The fair began on the eve of the feast of St Peter ad Vincula, August 1st and continued for three days. The events were certainly continuing until 1394 when market day was changed from a Tuesday to a Monday.

Eventually both ceased possibly due to the growth of the towns of Cheltenham and Winchcombe. Leland suggests that an accidental fire may have contributed to the decline of the town.

Although parts of Prestbury House have been in place for many years, one report puts an earlier house on the West side of the Burgage. Some residents may remember the open field opposite Prestbury house, the home of a famous Hereford bull.

Was this the site of an older residence?

Tony Noel

Local Historians – Norman Baker

In the first of a series of interviews Michelle Rees poses questions to one of our founders, Norman Baker.

How did your interest in local history begin?

I began working on my family history some years ago and through that visited various County Archives to examine old parish registers and other manuscripts. It seemed a natural progression to move on to local history. I enrolled for an external course at Exeter University on “Village and Parish History: Reconstructing the Local Past, 1500-1800”. When we purchased a house in Prestbury that gave a good focus for my studies.

How do you decide on a topic to research?

The university studies included some reading and an essay on the Enclosures of the 18th – 20th centuries. Knowing by then that we would be moving to Prestbury I turned to the Prestbury Enclosure Act of 1732. Everything else has flowed from that study; my interest in fields, farms and land holdings; the Dissolution under Henry VIII; tithes; and the historical maps.

How have you seen the research process change or develop?

The great change in both family history and local history studies has been the availability of material on line. A subscription to Ancestry and to the Newspaper Archive, brings to your screen an incredible amount of information. There are also many other informative and helpful websites. What is not available online are the resources of the local County Archive which is a treasure house of old manuscripts. The County Archives are available to all. It is a pleasure and privilege on a visit to the Archives to hold and study unique documents written centuries ago. The original source documents are the ultimate evidence for the local historian.

What has been your most interesting discovery?

If you approach the moated manor house on foot you will realise that from all sides except the east along Shaw Green Lane you have to climb, which raises the problem of water supply because the house and its moat and duck pond were above the level of any water source. Fresh water was obviously needed for the use of the house and running water was required for the moat which acted as a drain. Where did that water come from? I had carefully examined the

archaeological reports and the maps for the locality but could not find a solution. On a visit to the National Archives at Kew I found The Star Chamber records of a case in 1609 which related to Prestbury and which incidentally led me to realise that I had discovered the source of the water supply at the old moated Manor House. See my article and appendix in Prestbury Past and Present, Volume 2, p111f.

When studying the recently acquired Enclosure map I discovered a second village pound. There is a reference in the Manor Court Rolls 1766 to the watercourse that leads from the pound to Wyman's Brook. The only pound I knew was on the corner of Park Lane and Bowbridge. Clearly there could be no watercourse from there to Wyman's Brook but there was no trace of any other pound – until the newly discovered 1731 Enclosure Map. When I studied the map I found a pound at the junction of Deep Street and Tatchley Lane so the problem was solved – and another one raised! The map plus the Court Roll reference shows that a watercourse ran from the pound to Wyman's Brook so this must be the old course of the Noverton Brook which continued along the north side of what is now the Prestbury Road recreation ground and on past the old Cakebridge Farm to Wyman's Brook between Cakebridge and Pittville Park. The Deep Street part of Noverton Brook was obviously visible in 1766 but is not now so either it is in a culvert or the leat which was created to divert the Noverton Brook to the Lower Mill pond around the churchyard is later than we thought. (Can someone find a map of culverts in Prestbury? I have tried but failed.) If the Noverton Brook was diverted from its normal course down the High Street and Deep Street to feed into the Lower Mill pond via the leat around the churchyard after 1766 who did it, why and when?

How do you see the future of PLHS?

I am sure that there will always be an interest in local history and thus a place for the history society. We have a good committee whose members work hard. Our lifeblood as a society is study and research and we have a great need for more researchers. We can offer guidance and support to any who are interested.

Michelle Rees

Captain Hugh Woollcombe-Boyce

If you climb the Millennium Steps from Mill Street into the churchyard, on your right is a grave with a large cross and low railings. It is the grave of Captain Hugh Woollcombe-Boyce.



Captain Woolcombe-Boyce was born on 22 March 1861 at The Priory, Cheltenham, the son of Reverend William Woollcombe-Boyce and Jane Vivian Woollcombe.

He was a serving officer in the 6th Dragoon Guards but did not die on duty but on 1st March 1890 following a fall from a horse at Sandown racecourse where he was a talented amateur Jockey.

His funeral was said to be one of the largest congregations ever to attend St Mary's Prestbury. The Dragoon Guards formed a guard of honour and the Captain's favourite charger followed the coffin. Eight carriages carried mourners to the church and many others walked from Cheltenham.

Clearly there was a great deal of respect for this man. He left an orphan daughter, Margery Barbara, his wife, Margaret Matilda, having died three years earlier shortly after the birth of her daughter.

Tony Noel

100 Years of the Women's Institute in Prestbury

Prestbury Women's Institute, set up in 1921, celebrated its one hundredth birthday this year. The U.K. W I movement began in 1915 and swiftly gathered momentum during WW1 when women gained more independence by doing manual jobs whilst the men were away fighting and also working on the farms and land as "The Women's Land army".

In 1919 in this area Winchcombe and Sudeley started an Institute led by Marion Dent Brocklehurst of Sudeley Castle. Spurred on by the enthusiasm in Winchcombe a number of Prestbury ladies decided to do likewise. Miss Constance Lilian Ratcliff of Southam De La Bere, Maud Baghott de la Bere, wife of the vicar and living at "The Cottage" and Mrs Lidderdale, wife of the doctor and living at The Cleevelands (now Idsall House), gathered together a group of ladies and in February 1921 they enrolled forty nine as members of Prestbury Women's Institute. They met at "The Men's Hall" which was then on the land now occupied by the King's Arms car park. It was not long however before the ladies decided that they needed a Hall of their own to hold meetings and to hold such other activities for the whole village to participate in.

In fact, it took just four years for this to be realised when the WI Hall was opened in September 1925. They bought a piece of land from Major Capel and accepted a loan from a friend for just over £1,000 and had other projects to raise some money. The result is the Hall that is still used today and still owned by the WI members. They were able to pay back the loan within five years-a remarkable thing to have been done by ladies at this time as it wasn't until 1928 that the females as a whole were able to vote.

Val Porter

And finally ... over to you

Do you have any burning questions about the history of Prestbury or its inhabitants?

Do you have suggestions for research topics, newsletter articles or future talks?

Have you ever wondered about the history of your home or street?

If so, please send your questions or suggestions to the society's email address prestburyhistory@gmail.com or speak to one of the committee at an indoor meeting. Michelle Rees has volunteered to find someone to provide the answers or raise it for discussion with the committee.