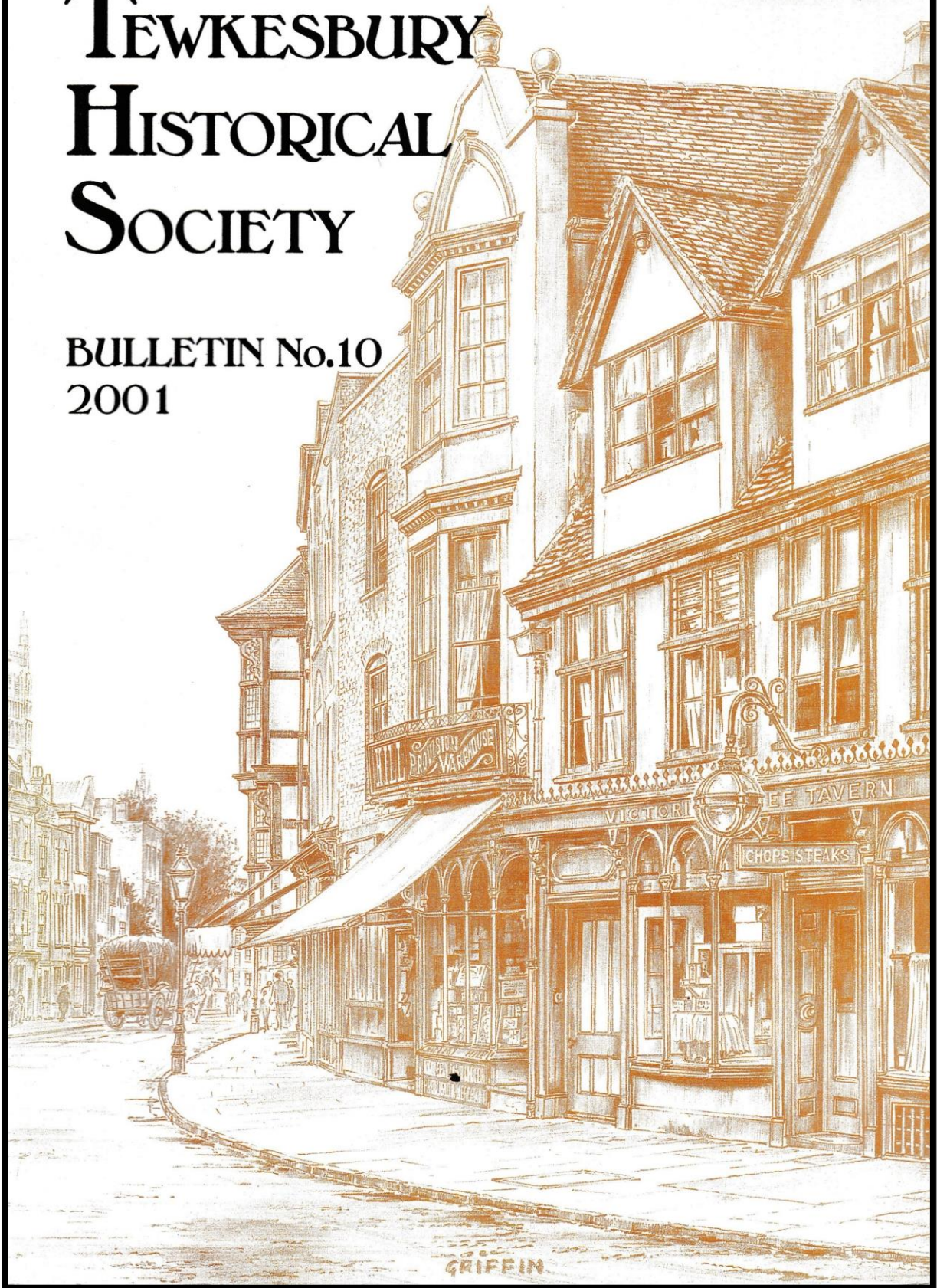


TEWKESBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BULLETIN No.10
2001



THE HISTORY OF TEWKESBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY – THE FIRST TEN YEARS –

Bill Rennison

Inaugural Meeting – 16 January 1991

The initiative to found an historical society in Tewkesbury was taken by the County Library Service, the Town Library and Tewkesbury School. An invitation list was drawn up on the initiative of Cheryl White, then employed at Tewkesbury Library and holding a brief to encourage Local History, and John Dixon, Head of History at Tewkesbury School. Their list included local authors such as Anthea Jones, Kathleen Ross and Bryan Linnell, and others with a known interest in local history. Representatives were also invited from other organisations with similar interests, e.g. Terry Riccalton attended on behalf of the Civic Society.

It was decided that there was sufficient interest to form a society. Those attending this inaugural meeting were officially recorded as:

Cheryl White, Angela Roberts, Sue Lawrence, Rose Hogan, Margaret Newey, Dr. Anthea Jones, Reginald & Kathleen Ross, John Dixon, Bill Rennison, Gus Strawford, Geoff Hubbard, Cliff Burd, Brian Jerrard, Terry Riccalton and Bryan Linnell.

The following aims were determined:

To provide an integrated resource centre, to co-ordinate and disseminate research, to arrange talks, exhibitions and visits, and to produce a bulletin.

Constituent Meeting – 14 February 1991

A draft constitution based on that of Painswick Local History Society was produced and the meeting broke up into separate groups, each discussing and amending aspects of the proposed constitution, which was to be submitted to our first Annual General Meeting in April.

It was decided to call our new society, *Tewkesbury Historical Society*. A proposal to call us Tewkesbury & District Local History Society was defeated 10-6.

It was also decided to run a series of lectures on researching local history under the auspices of the W.E.A. (Workers Education Association). This was supported by David Smith, the County Archivist, and Anne Withers of the W.E.A.

First Public Meeting – 21 March 1991

There was no speaker and members were asked to state their interests and a very wide-ranging list was produced. Enthusiasts' interests included:

Tewkesbury Park estate, inventory analysis, maps, the Workhouse, Oldbury Schools, Walton Cardiff, tapestries, the John Moore Papers, Genealogy, Methodists, railways, cholera outbreaks, and the two World Wars.

Many, but not all, of these topics have been well covered over the years. Activities requested were:

Dr. Anthea Jones to run a course on maps and mapping
To establish oral history – suggested subjects included Barry Sweet and Ray Chandler
To index the '*Tewkesbury Register*'
To index census materials
To arrange outside speakers but also to encourage members to speak.

Meetings would be held on Thursdays.

First Annual General Meeting – 25 April 1991

In the absence of an elected committee, John Dixon was elected Chairman and Cheryl White Secretary. The proposed title and constitution were adopted. The first committee was elected:

Margaret Newey, Cheryl White, Irene Hayward, Rose Hogan, Yvonne Griffin, John Dixon, Cliff Burd, Colin Wicken, Bryan Linnell, Bill Rennison and Cameron Talbot.

The committee withdrew briefly from the meeting to confirm the Chairman and Secretary and to appoint Bill Rennison as Treasurer. The annual subscription was fixed at £3, not £5 as suggested, but with no concessions. Steven Blake then spoke of his experiences as Chairman and Secretary of Cheltenham Local History Society.

Founder Members 1991-2

Lucille Bell	Mary Hartland	Audrey Pound	Wendy Snarey
Cliff Burd	Rose Hogan	Bill Rennison	Cameron Talbot
Norah Day	Bryan Linnell	Reg Ross	Anne Wicken
John Dixon			

All the above are still members of the Society. Bryan Linnell and Norah Day are now Honorary Life Members. 71 people paid a subscription in our first year.

Officers

<i>President:</i>	1996–	John Dixon
<i>Chairman:</i>	1991–1996	John Dixon
	1996–2000	Roxy Base
	2000–	Christine Donald
<i>Secretary:</i>	1991–1994	Cheryl White
	1994–1997	Colin Wicken
	1997–1998	Cynthia Brown
	1998–	David Willavoy
<i>Treasurer:</i>	1991–1995	Bill Rennison
	1995–1998	Bill Camp
	1998–	Bill Rennison

Committee

<i>Deputy Treasurer:</i>	1994–1995	Bill Camp
	1995–1998	Bill Rennison
	1998–	Bill Camp
<i>Social Secretary:</i>	1991–1993	Irene Hayward
	1993–	Mary Hartland
<i>Research Co-ordinator:</i>	1991–1995	Cameron Talbot
	1995–	John Dixon

Though much research has been done by members and much of it has been published in the Bulletin, the post of research co-ordinator may not have proved an arduous one but is as enjoyable as it is invisible.

<i>Programme Secretaries:</i>	1991–1994	Cheryl White and Margaret Newey
	1994–1997	Pat McKay, Janet Devereux, Janet Thomson
	1997–2000	Janet Thomson
	2000–	Wendy Snarey

Is it significant that we have always entrusted the preparation of our programmes to the ladies? What an interesting and varied programme they have given us over the years!

<i>Bulletin Editors:</i>	1991–1999	Colin Wicken
	1999–	Editorial team

Committee changes over the years:

- 1992 – Yvonne Griffin, Bryan Linnell and Rose Hogan retired though Rose has continued to serve as our publicity agent. Peter Griffin joined, as did Kate Franklin (Assistant Librarian). Sue Collins joined as Minute Secretary.
- 1993 – Kate Franklin never took up her place, which was taken by Janet Thomson. Irene Hayward moved to Matlock and Margaret Newey resigned. Mavis Rear and Janet Devereux were elected.
- 1994 – Sue Collins and Mavis Rear retired. Pat McKay was elected.
- 1995 – Cameron Talbot retired. Bill Camp joined.
- 1996 – Peter Griffin left. Roxy Base and Cynthia Brown joined.
- 1997 – Pat McKay left. Gordon Baker joined.
- 1998 – Gordon Baker left. David Willavoys joined.
- 1999 – Janet Devereux resigned. Wendy Snarey joined.
- 2000 – Janet Thomson and Cynthia Brown resigned. Christine Donald joined.

THS Bulletin

The editing and preparation of the Bulletin was the work of Colin Wicken, who reported provisional costings to the committee as early as June 1991. His first Bulletin in 1992 was photocopied at Tewkesbury School and retailed to members at £3, £4 to others. The following Bulletin was also duplicated at Tewkesbury School with considerable help from Mavis Rear, then on the staff of the School. The committee took the decision in 1994 to have it produced professionally. In spite of an anonymous donation of £150, this was a great strain on the Society's finances. This professional printing meant a much better production of the illustrations, now doing justice to the excellent material Peter Griffin has continued to produce over the years. We have been privileged to use Peter's superb illustrations for each cover of our annual Bulletin, and he also designed our letterhead, which is still much admired.

Sadly Colin died in April 1999, shortly after editing and contributing an article on local convicts shipped to Tasmania for the 1999 Bulletin. Since then an editorial team of John Dixon, Bill Rennison, Roxy Base and Bill Camp has tried to follow Colin's high standards.

Auditors

The Society has been well served by its two auditors, both retired bank officials of Barclays and the Midland (HSBC) respectively. John Higgins checked our accounts until his sudden untimely death in 1995. He was also an ordinary member. Cecil Hallett, who took over at short notice, has audited our accounts ever since.

Grants

The Cheltenham & Gloucester Building Society gave us an initial grant to launch the Society. In 1994-5 Tewkesbury Borough Council gave grants for software for the library computer and subsequently towards the Bulletin. In 1999 Tewkesbury Town Council gave money to help mount our Millennium Exhibition. In 2000 the Gloucestershire Rural Community Council gave £225 to help purchase tape-recording equipment for our Oral History project.

Bob Woodard Memorial Award

This was instituted in 1997 in memory of Bob Woodard, a founder member whose work on the 1851 Census is the basis of the computer records in Tewkesbury Library. Bob inspired our progress towards using computers in local history and was a wonderful mentor. He started the use of a database in the Town Library, known as the Woodard database. We are grateful to the County Library Service for providing the computer. The honour of the Woodard Award is greatly prized by members. It is awarded annually for the best piece of research on local history published in the Bulletin. The winners are:

1997 – Colin Wicken – '77 Barton Street,' Bulletin No.5 (1996), p.32.

1998 – John Dixon – 'The Oxford Movement in Gloucestershire,' Bulletin No.6 (1997), p.35.

1999 – David Willavoys – ‘Thomas Collins,’ Bulletin No.7 (1998), p.15.

2000 – Bill Camp and Derek Round – ‘91 Church Street, the Vaulted Cellar and J.M.W. Turner, R.A.,’ Bulletin No.8 (1999), p.2.

A prize is also given for the best piece of local history research by a pupil at Tewkesbury School. Since 2000 the prize is known as the Colin Wicken Bursary. The winners are:

1997 – Cameron Lawrence – ‘Tewkesbury’s Textile Industry,’ Bulletin No.2 (1993), p.7.

1998 – Hannah Lord – ‘Early Hospital Provision in Tewkesbury,’ Bulletin No.7 (1998), p.53.

1999 – Lucy Hodges – ‘Walton House,’ Bulletin No.8 (1999), p.34.

2000 – Gemma Wall – ‘Voluntary Recruitment, 1914-16,’ Bulletin No.9 (2000), p.58.

Throughout this period the judges have been David Smith, until recently County Archivist, and David Aldred, Head of History at Cleeve School.

Honorary Life Members

As the Society developed, we decided to honour members who had made an outstanding contribution to Local History in the Town with Life Membership. Our first award in 1996 was to the late Bob Woodard who pioneered our use of computers, and then in 1998 to the late Colin Wicken who edited our Bulletins with such distinction for the first eight editions. Bryan Linnell and Norah Day, who have both written and published numerous and invaluable books on the history of our town, are now Honorary Life Members.

In 2000 an Honours Board was affixed in the Library foyer with the names of Woodard Award winners and Honorary Life Members.

Programmes

The Society has always aimed to provide an interesting and varied programme of illustrated talks, mainly on subjects of local interest. It would be impractical to give all the titles but some of the more memorable are listed:

1992 – Tony Condor – ‘The Waterways Museum in Gloucester’

Malcolm Wanklyn – ‘River Trade on the Severn’

1993 – Peter Bloomfield – ‘Tewkesbury in the Civil War’

Russell Howes – ‘The Cotswolds at War’

1994 – Ray Burrows – ‘The Railways and Victorian Society’

Peter Simpkins (Imperial War Museum) – ‘Myths and Realities of the Blitz’

Anthea Jones – ‘Tewkesbury: Burgages and the Franchise’

1995 – Professor Michael Hicks – ‘King Richard III’

1996 – Simon Lawton – ‘The John Moore Countryside Museum’

Ross Sims – ‘Winchcombe Prison Museum’

1997 – Mrs. I. J. Butwell – ‘Old Tewkesbury on Cinefilm’

Harry Workman – ‘Tewkesbury Memories’

1998 – Don Chapman – ‘William Morris and the Arts & Crafts Movement’

Kevin Minchew – ‘Cider Making’

Dave Cubbage – ‘Making Armour for Battle Re-enactment Societies’

George Pearl, John Dixon and Cliff Burd – ‘Tewkesbury’s Alleyways’

1999 – Tim Porter – ‘Medieval Pilgrimage in Gloucestershire’

Denise Taylor – ‘Seventeenth Century Wedding Customs’

James Turtle – ‘Diaries and Memoirs’

2000 – Louise Wood – ‘Medieval Sweetmeats and Sugarcraft’

Malcolm Atkin – ‘The Time Team Archaeological Dig at Kemerton’

John Whitaker – ‘H. H. Martyn and the Gloster Aircraft Company’

Undoubtedly the talk on the Alleyways was the most popular. We reached the limit of 80 in the Elmbury Room and had to exclude many members and visitors. A second talk a few days later was also oversubscribed. The talk has since been presented to various other organisations in and around the town.

Outside Visits

From the start the Society has sought to arrange educational visits, but has met with limited success. We started off well. In July 1991 a visit to Forthampton Court was over-subscribed and an archaeological visit to Guiting Power was also well supported.

However, in 1992 Tony Condor's talk on the Waterways Museum did not inspire enough members to sign up for a river trip to Gloucester.

Two field walks led by Anthea Jones were better supported, one from Tewkesbury following old field paths along the boundary of Tewkesbury Park to the Odessa Inn and back to the Gupshill for refreshment, and a field walk from the Mythe to Upper Lode.

A talk by David Lloyd on "How to research a town" was followed by an interesting trip to Ludlow.

In 1995 we visited Ashchurch Camp and Museum. Evenings visits to Bredon Manor and Tithe Barn and to Kemerton were well supported but projected trips to the Opie Museum of Packaging in Gloucester and to Monmouth had to be cancelled because of lack of support.

Social Evenings

Traditionally our first meeting of the New Year has been a social gathering with members bringing food and drink, often local in character. Quizzes have kept us mentally alert, the questions usually being provided by Cliff Burd, based on the Bulletins, Local History books and his wonderful collection of old postcards.

Members' Evenings

The second meeting of each New Year has been our members' evening when about four members have each read a short paper on their own research. Many have been gems and were subsequently included in the next Bulletin. However, in 2000 the Bulletin was greatly oversubscribed and proposed articles were included in the Members' Evening presentation.

Annual Dinner

Again it was Colin Wicken who suggested in committee that we should have an annual dinner. The first, in 1997, was held at the Gupshill Manor Hotel where we have dined well in each subsequent year. The meal has been followed by some light-hearted historical entertainment. One year it was a Balloon Debate; another year we staged 'Twenty Questions' when each member had to choose a Tewkesbury character and Cliff Burd was the only member to beat the panel as Sir Raymond Priestley. In 1999 we were asked to pick our Tewkesburian of the Millennium and to justify our choice. Norah Day won as Sybil, wife of Robert FitzHamon.

Millennium Project

It was in September 1997 that Cynthia Brown proposed that we should mount an exhibition in the Library to record as many aspects as we could of Tewkesbury at the Millennium. Members agreed to be responsible for different aspects of our town with Cynthia holding a supervisory brief, and collecting and mounting much of the material.

Cynthia also photographed all the shops and business premises in the three main streets and mounted the photographs in a continuous strip. She and Alan Snarey also recorded on video tape '*A Day in the Life of Tewkesbury at the Millennium.*' Alan Snarey has subsequently expanded this material as part of a two-hour tape on '*Tewkesbury at the Millennium,*' currently on sale.

The exhibition opened in the Elmbury Room at the Library on 14 December 1999 when it was launched by the Town Mayor at a Wine and Cheese party. It was open for four weeks. Over four hundred visited the exhibition, donating over £100, which was given to Tewkesbury Hospital League of Friends.

After the exhibition was dismantled it was carefully stowed away for transfer to the County Record Office, where it will remain as part of the permanent archives.

W.E.A. Classes

These were envisaged as early as the second preparatory meeting in February 1991 and were duly launched under Anthea Jones in September when a course on researching local documents attracted such support that two classes had to be arranged for the course. Other courses followed but after three years dwindling numbers and increasing costs caused them to be discontinued. A few one-day courses on shops and buildings were held later.

Oral History

This has been talked about in committee from the very first meetings. However, comparatively little has been done though it does seem that under the leadership of Christine Donald, and following an instruction course by Sue Barrance in August 2000, real progress may be made in the near future.

Twinning (with Tewksbury, Massachusetts)

Cliff Burd and Bill Rennison attended meetings of a wider Twinning Committee chaired by Stanley Greenland but there was little support in the town and a formal link did not materialise. However, our President, John Dixon, has established links with the Tewksbury, Mass. Historical Society and visited the town in 1998, when he was honoured by an invitation to speak to their society.

Other Activities

In July 1992 a group of American ex-servicemen who had served at CVD Ashchurch was shown round the town, where they tried to remember their haunts of fifty years ago.

The Society helped to mount a school exhibition on Railways in 1991.

Cheryl White was the moving spirit in mounting an exhibition of the River in May 1992.

Colin Wicken organised an exhibition on William Tyndale in November 1994 on the quatercentenary of his birth, and also arranged a talk by Professor David Driscoll in the Roses Theatre.

On 25 June 2000 the Gloucestershire Rural Community Council held its annual Regional open meeting at the newly refurbished Methodist Hall and committee members led guided tours around the town.

Records

Indexing the '*Tewkesbury Register*' has been on the agenda throughout our ten years. Kathleen Ross, with the help of Margaret Newey and Olive Pain, made some progress with the records then kept in a number of shoe boxes! Technology then emerged and, in 1996, students from Tewkesbury School transferred this information into the database to add to Bob Woodard's census records. In recent years David Willavoys has supervised a monthly working panel of half-a-dozen members at the Town Hall. Much still remains to be done but great progress has been made in adding to our knowledge of our town and making it accessible to the public. This process will continue in our second decade of life!

