



The Regional Historian

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EDITORIAL

THE REGIONAL HISTORY CENTRE: A NEW DIRECTOR

The Regional History Centre began life in 1997, and, to some extent, took over where the Bristol Historical Database left off. The aim was to increase access to the fruits of research and to promote cooperation and partnership with interested organisations and individuals, local and national, and the exchange of news, research and information, in relation to the history of Bristol and its region (an area deliberately left without clear boundaries, but encompassing Gloucestershire, Somerset, Wiltshire and south-east Wales). We have been co-directors since 1997, ably assisted, in turn, by Stuart Taylor and Kath Holden. Stuart and Kath usually carried out most of the editorial duties of *The Regional Historian*, which started out as the RHC newsletter and quickly developed into something rather more sophisticated, in effect, a twice-yearly journal for those interested in the history of this region. *The Regional Historian* has been distributed free to a large circulation list, and has published a considerable number of excellent articles covering a very wide range of topics. Most of this material has come from our readers, and we have been greatly impressed and encouraged by the quality of the contributions, and enthusiasm of the contributors and readers. We are very grateful for the support and interest you have shown in the RHC.

During our time, the RHC has clocked up some notable achievements: a major international conference on The Atlantic Slave Trade and Provincial; the launch of the Bristol Historical Resources CD, edited by Peter Wardley; the website; regular one-day conferences, while individual members of the RHC have published widely on aspects of the history of the region. We have also developed good links with important bodies with interests in the region's history, such as the Bristol Museums, the Bristol Record Office and Central Reference Library, Avon Local History Association, the Historical Association, and the Victoria County History.

However, we're moving on to other things – but will continue to work closely with the RHC – and it is time for a new director: Dr Steve Poole. Steve is well known to many of you. He is a graduate of both UWE and the University of Bristol, and is an expert in the social and political history of 18th and early 19th century England, with a

particular interest in the West of England. As anyone who has attended any of his lectures or papers will testify, he is A dynamic and entertaining speaker. Steve has lots of good ideas for the future direction of the RHC, and his appointment promises to usher in a new and exciting stage in its development. We wish him well.

Madge Dresser and Peter Fleming

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CHANGING AVEBURY BY BRIAN EDWARDS

If the new Stonehenge visitor experience planned by English Heritage fails to attract the officially estimated million cars that each year cruise the A344 for a drive-by fix of prehistory, then the state driven plan to close this road and put the A303 in a tunnel may have a knock-on effect. Some will drive round Salisbury or down the A303 to Stourhead, but the possibility remains that a number may react similar to those English Heritage eject from Stonehenge after the summer solstice, and head for Avebury. Even a small percentage increase in visitor numbers would alter Avebury considerably, and we should perhaps recall what happened after state enforced change induced the influx of 'Five Milers' ...

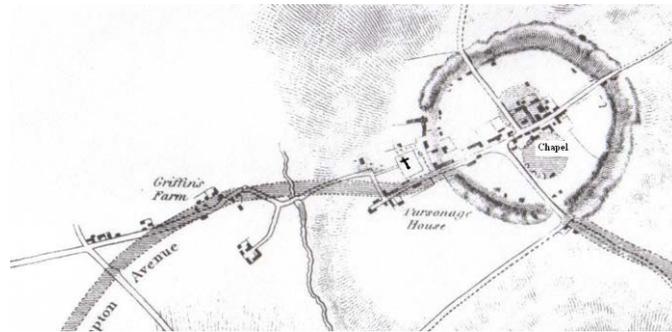
After John Aubrey introduced Charles II to Avebury in 1663, the monarch was keen that the site was recorded and protected. Which is rather ironic as only two years later Charles II gave assent to the Five Mile Act (1665) that instigated a five mile exclusion zone around towns precluding those non-conformists dispossessed by the Act of Uniformity (1662). Drawing five mile circles around populated areas created an island of Avebury, that just happened to be a little over five miles from Marlborough, Pewsey, Devizes, Calne, Wootton Bassett, Wroughton, Chiseldon, and the Ogbournes. Avebury was thus highlighted as an official haven for 'Five Mile' refugees.

Avebury presented such an oasis that Noah Webb travelled each week from Hampshire to preach and Thomas Rashley, who had been dispossessed of Barford St Martin, relocated. John Baker, dispossessed of Chiseldon in 1662, started a chapel at Avebury with Thomas Mills of Calne in 1670, and other dissenters followed. In 1670 there were 25 non-conformists and 181 Anglicans in Avebury, but by 1715 the non-conformist congregation had swelled to 130. As the Act of Indulgence was introduced in 1672 the increase was perhaps not all due to incomers, but if it was not an influx of Puritanism that sought to destroy the Avebury stones, then the expansion in population and focus saw sarsens removed to create plots and pasture with the stones broken up for building material.

Among the leaders of the Avebury non-conformists at the turn of the century was William Stukeley's arch-villain Thomas Robinson, who, through stone clearances of individual pasture plots and sarsen-breaking for infill housing, was accommodating and speculatively encouraging colonisation of the Avebury circle by immigrant dissenters. The congregation also included 'stone-breaker' Thomas Griffin, whose father was a founder member of the chapel. John Griffin purchased his farm in 1681 as did Richard Phelps, and land was purchased by Mary Stevenson who was to marry Walter Stretch landlord or the Catherine Wheel, giving birth to George Stretch who was perhaps one of those dissenting offspring refused Baptism by Avebury's vicar who also refused to bury non-conformists.

Despite the hostile attitudes demonstrated towards non-conformist settlers by the all Anglican local establishment of squire, vicar, and parish clerk (a hostility, noted by Aubrey as the result of eating too much cheese, and interpreted by the soon to be ordained Stukeley as individual fondness for sarsens); Tithe disputes had undermined Anglican worship in the parish and indigenous parishioners viewed the 'separatist' incomers as ordinary folk more like themselves than the establishment were ever likely to be. Thus Avebury parishioners dug graves for dissenters, and even tolled the church bell for their loss. The neighbourly disposition was thereby welcoming when a geographical chapel community, based around the chapel built in

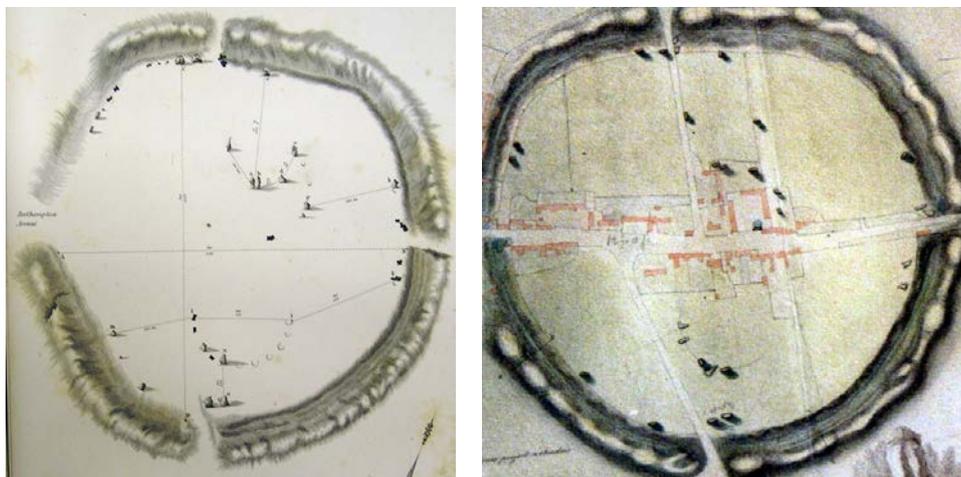
Samuel Morris's centre circle garden, grew in focus to form a chapel village quite distinct from Avebury church village.



Avebury was thus transformed from a church settlement pattern adjacent to a henge, much akin to that found at Marden in Wiltshire today, to housing a quite separate and distinct satellite community nucleated through a centre circle farm. Walls, paths, and buildings were constructed of sarsen, as was the 'Five Mile' Gothic styled chapel.

William Stukeley loved this sort of low constructed Gothic, so it must have proved painfully ironic for the conformist father of field archaeology to record that Avebury's 'Temple' had been robbed of sarsen to build such a non-conformist chapel, in a design he loved.

The Five Mile Act saw the internal boundaries of Avebury redrawn a century prior to being redrawn again under the enclosure movement. Stones that remained part of boundaries tended to survive unless they fell, in which case they were broken up and removed, but the additional boundary changes placed additional stones at risk.



Avebury: the inclusion of boundary lines explains sarsen survivals.

Of those stones that survived the building programme that followed the influx of Five Milers, a pocket of stones remained on ground petrified between the chapel's west boundary and the pre-existing common pound that bordered the road from the south. The stones protected on this no-man's land were destined to survive, except those that remained on the corner of the Kennett road and Green Street. They fell prey to the convenience and increased speed of wheeled transport entering and leaving the Five Mile village.

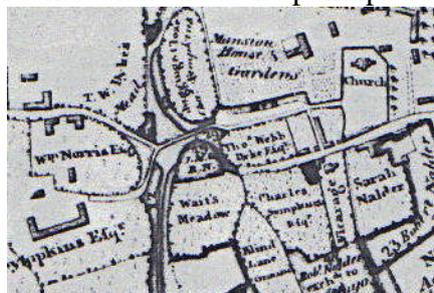
Change begets change, and the timing of the Five Mile Act had an effect as catastrophic as the influx it caused. For following the Civil War, the Restoration, and

Great Fire of London, a gradual programme of uplift and modernity upgraded main routes linked with London to support the carriage of building material. Roads outside this network were in appalling and sometimes impassable condition, but irrespective of this the traffic to and from London continued to grow. The geographical misfortunes of the Five Mile Act was thus compounded by Avebury's position betwixt London and Bristol, and the draw created by dissenters regularly travelling to Avebury was an incitement to those piloting haulage and later coach routes on what frequently were no more than droves. Littered as the Downs are with sarsens the stones were destined to feed the - at first sporadic and local then later systematic and national - road repairs, and the increased traffic this eventually witnessed in turn supported an expanding roadside infrastructure including the building of roadhouses and the extension of inns. After churches, monasteries and manor houses, the buildings most notably utilising stone were inns, and the enlargement and improvement of facilities at this time persuaded carriers to patronise the premises.

Much the same as the *Red Lion* dining room was extended to accommodate a dance band when Alexander Keiller brought prosperity to inter-war Avebury, a dining room extension was added to Avebury's 17th century *Catherine Wheel*, the landlord of which opened another inn of the same name at Beckhampton, where the Bear (now the Wagon and Horses) was built in 1669.

It is instructive that those most criticised by Stukeley, if not separatists, were actually landlords: Walter Stretch of the Catherine Wheel, John Fowler of the White Hart at Kennet, and Richard Fowler of the Hare and Hounds, Beckhampton, which is now the Wagon and Horses. These landlords were entrepreneurs and subsequently seized upon the rising trade following the influx of Five Milers to Avebury. For while Puritans were perhaps not all inn users as such, not all separatists were devout Puritans, and of more significance is the timing and resultant influence of their influx. The timing of the draw their gatherings created was not only significant in relation to the adoption of routes in the carriage of goods from Bristol to London, but the Bristol route gave rise to embryonic service areas on the developing route between London and the budding resort of Bath.

At the onset of the 18th century the old western approach to Avebury became increasingly impassable to developing travel, and a by-pass was required to avoid both the hazardous river crossing and corners difficult for horse teams, that due to the heavy going of the roads were of great length and number. Hence 'New Bridge' had to be built south of the old crossing in 1701, and is still the route into Avebury from Bath and Bristol roads to this day. The old boundaries, routes and paths superseded through wheeled transport demanding easy convenient and speedier access were almost unrecognisable by 1794 (see below), and this illustrates how the seeming permanence of landscape soon overshadows the palimpsest.



In 1724 Avebury's south bank was cut back to facilitate the faster passage of coaches, and the danger posed by further main road improvements was to linger for some time.

Avebury's development on the Bath Road happened in part because the present Fyfield to Marlborough route north of the Kennet had, from the Norman Conquest, been blocked to through traffic by the extent of the castle grounds, from which Aubrey riding to hounds with Richard Seymour 'discovered' Avebury in 1649. The alternative routes had approached Marlborough either south of the river after crossing the Kennet at Fyfield, or from the north, as Pepys had travelled, leaving Avebury on Green Street then passing the Old Eagle at Rockley. Marlborough was somewhat circumnavigated leading to a loss of trade, and while traffic was rerouted over Castle Bridge c 1706 to make the High Street a thoroughfare, petitions complained that 'passengers and droves from London to Bristol' were using 'bye-ways and trespass on corn and commons' to by-pass the town because of the state of the roads. The Marlborough Beckhampton road was finally turnpiked in 1743, Celia Fiennes having witnessed c 1700 the demolition of the early 17th century civil war damaged house that had succeeded the castle estate, clearing the way for the magnificent house that would become the famous 'Castle' coaching inn of the Bath Road c1751. The new route inevitably accounted for yet more sarsens both in respect of the road and the infrastructure, for the White Hart at Kennett came to the fore around 1710-1720 as the riverside route was coming to fruition, and the owner of Avebury's Catherine Wheel foresaw the change, which is why he built another inn of the same name at Beckhampton.



Stukeley 1724, a horseman using the west ditch entrance.

The Five Mile Act instigated a chain of tremendous change between the times of Aubrey and Stukeley, the latter complaining bitterly that the destruction of Avebury was so recent he could write the obituary of each stone. The pace of this change we might judge as a coach took Samuel Pepys into Avebury in 1668, only three years after the Five Mile Act and before the founding of the chapel. In 1697 Joseph Howard of Beckhampton cleared some fields and meadow of stones, and opened a local shop. In 1706 Avebury had a market, and around 1694 the Great Bank was to accommodate a large threshing barn north-east of the church. Newly built, so large no doubt to accept the produce from local agricultural expansions, to which farmers Green and Griffin were to contribute. This was the 'Parsonage Barn', drawn by Stukeley. Many of the buildings he was to draw were new or newly extended, and although Stukeley never mentioned it, the Revd. James Mayo gave the vicarage and its garden a make-over when he took over from John White (d.1712) and no doubt recycled material from the adjacent ancient rockery.

While the Five Milers accounted for a number of the stones that Aubrey had found present but had disappeared by Stukeley's day, it is fair to note that the Five Milers did not introduce stone breaking to Avebury. Nor did they import the knowledge of how this was achieved more efficiently by stone burning. Long before the Restoration the vicar of Winterbourne Monkton, Parson Brinsden, informed Aubrey how the stones were being heated up to be broken, and in 1644, more than twenty years before the Five Mile Act, Richard Symonds noted stones being broken on Fyfield Down.

Until the seventeenth century, stone buildings in the vicinity were few. Restricted perhaps to church, manor, and priory. The process of using natural landscape materials to construct simple vernacular buildings was mostly restricted to timber, chalk, wattle and daub. Simple structures had no foundations, and prior to the discovery of the fire and water method for breaking megaliths, whole sarsens of a manageable size were introduced at the base of vernacular structures, and surviving buildings that deploy sarsens in this fashion remain evidence of the simple early uses of sarsen and an indication of the period when they were first used.

The Forge demolished at Overton in 1986 had whole uncut sarsens in its make-up, and from a coin in the base of the structure was of early 17th century origin. Conveniently supporting the supposition that while Aubrey started recording Avebury after stone breaking had begun, it was perhaps not very long after this that stone breaking was put to wider use. The Restoration seems an ironic starting point for the wholesale destruction of sarsens, albeit primarily for roads, but had it started very much earlier then it seems likely that Aubrey would not have found so many stones remaining.

Avebury visitor numbers have appreciably climbed since access to Stonehenge was limited during the 1980s, and the number attending the solstice at the lesser known site leapt when access to the more famous stone circle was denied. Even before the proposed road closures at Stonehenge, however, change once again has visited Avebury. The Five Mile chapel has recently undergone major building work, being converted into the Tourist Information office. Roads and paths were dug up to lay pipes and cables, and modern facilities installed. Double yellow lines have been painted along the Avenue, wooden posts line the northern approach, parking is now restricted and charged for, and huge new signs have been installed marking the World Heritage Site that also embraces Stonehenge.

The attendance at Stonehenge is already largely increased, and when the ... railway is opened ... I fear that the class of visitor will be very different to what it was in former years. (What) would (you) advise for preservation and protection to meet these very altered circumstances?

(Sir Edmund Antrobus to Henry Medlicott, 31 December 1900)

From Stonehenge the average saloon car can reach Avebury in around 30 minutes. If the tunnel removes the free view of the stones and this drives tourists to Avebury, most will not recognise the irony as they pass the new World Heritage Site signs on the four main approach roads, *located as they are around five miles from Marlborough, Devizes, Calne, and Wroughton...*

Acknowledgements:

Many thanks to Dr Ros Cleal for commenting on the first draft.

All images courtesy of the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society Library.

Additional Currency:

In addition to the usual sources see: *Compton Census* (Canterbury, 1676); William Salt Library Salt MSS. 33; D.A. Crowley (ed), *V.C.H. Wilts.* XII (1983), p.103; Hilary Dunscombe, *Avebury: A Five Mile Chapel* (Avebury, n.d.); David Boyd Haycock, *William Stukeley: Science, Religion and Archaeology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Woodbridge, 2002), especially pp. 109-133; B. Haynes, 'Plan of Allotments and Exchanged Lands in the Parish of Avebury' (Salisbury, 1794); W.H. Hyatt, 'Avebury Wilts' (1820); R.B. Pugh and E. Crowley (eds.), *V.C.H. Wilts.* III (1956), pp.104-7; Donald A. Spaeth, *The Church in an Age of Danger: Parsons and Parishoners 1660-1740* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 150-1; 'Marden 19 August 1776': WSRO, 510/11, and *Ordnance Survey* 1886 as illustrated in John Chandler, *The Vale of Pewsey* (Bradford on Avon, 2000 edition).

This article previously appeared in the final edition of 3rd *Stone Magazine* (47) 2003. We are grateful to the editor for permission to reproduce this article here.

MURDER, ALCHEMY, AND THE WARS OF THE ROSES

By Peter Fleming

What follows is a kind of murder mystery, but not a whodunit. The identity of the man who carried out the crime, while indeed a mystery, is probably unknowable and actually unimportant. There is little room for doubt as to the identity of the man who gave him the order. The real mystery lies with the identity of the victim. In attempting to solve the mystery, we shall enter the kaleidoscope of faction and violence that was high politics during the Wars of the Roses, and make the acquaintance of one of fifteenth-century England's foremost alchemists.

In March 1461 Edward earl of March, and since his father's death at the battle of Wakefield the previous December, duke of York, seized the throne from the hapless Lancastrian Henry VI, to become Edward IV, the first Yorkist king. He was helped in his efforts by Richard Neville, earl of Warwick – the 'Kingmaker' as he would much later be known – a man whose immense wealth and power was matched by his ambition and ruthlessness. By the beginning of 1469 it might have seemed as if Edward had finally buried all hope of a Lancastrian revival: the last rebel outposts had been taken, Henry VI was a prisoner, and his indomitable queen, Margaret of Anjou, was in exile. The country was held by a network of trusted lieutenants. In the Bristol region – Gloucestershire, Somerset, and south-east Wales – paramount among these were Warwick himself and William Herbert, who had been raised to the earldom of Pembroke in September of the previous year. Pembroke was the son of Sir William ap Thomas, and between them they had built Raglan Castle in Monmouthshire, probably the most magnificent of fifteenth-century castles in England and Wales.¹ Warwick had strong local interests through the Despenser inheritance of his wife Anne Beauchamp and his cousin, George Neville, son of Lord Abergavenny. These included extensive estates in Gloucestershire as well as the Earls court of the Honour of Gloucester, held at St James's Priory in Bristol, and an interest in the manor and hundred of the Barton, which covered a large area to the immediate east and north of the town.² As we shall see, members of Pembroke's family were active in Bristol in the 1460s.

However, a very astute and well-placed observer of events in early 1469 might have detected signs that Edward's rule was not so secure. Edward's recent marriage to Elizabeth Woodville, the widow of a Lancastrian knight, brought her numerous kin into the royal family, and many of these had to be found suitably elevated husbands and wives. This severely restricted the scope of Warwick's plans for his own family. He may have resented the influence that the Woodvilles were now enjoying, feeling that he no longer had the king's ear. He may have been offended that such relatively lowly people were now his social and political equals. However, it was probably differences over foreign policy that most enraged him: he had been pursuing a French alliance, but the Woodville marriage was swiftly followed by an alliance with the duke of Burgundy, the French king's bitter rival. Warwick felt that he had been made to look foolish on the international stage. He began plotting against the king he believed he had helped to make, and even managed to suborn Edward's own brother, George, duke of Clarence. The pair covertly encouraged rebellion in the north. In July 1469 Warwick's opposition to Edward was made brutally apparent at the battle of Edgecote, near Banbury, where his forces comprehensively defeated a largely Welsh army led by Pembroke and Humphrey Stafford, earl of Devon. This was a victory not only over Edward, but also Pembroke, who was captured. He and Warwick were personal enemies, and had long quarrelled over the contested lordship of South Wales. Immediately after the battle Pembroke and his brother Sir Richard Herbert were executed.

In the murderous purge of the Edwardian loyalists that followed, another Herbert was killed at Bristol within a month of the battle. Together with the execution of the earl of Devon in Bridgwater in August, the massacre of the Herberts effectively removed the uppermost layer of royal authority in the West Country. The executions at Bristol and Bridgwater were almost certainly carried out by order of Warwick.

Who was the man killed at Bristol? At least ten years later he was described by the Bristol chronicler and town clerk Robert Ricart as Pembroke's brother: 'And one of the lorde Herbert his brothir was slayne at Bristowe'³ Another chronicler, John Warkworth, master of Peterhouse, Cambridge, writing between 1478 and 1483 and apparently well-informed on Edgecote and its aftermath, identified him as Thomas.⁴ William Worcestre, the Bristol-born antiquarian, writing at around the same time, and whom one might expect to be at least as well-informed on events in the town of his birth, was unsure: in his account of the aftermath of Edgecote he deleted his first identification of *Richard* in favour of *William* Herbert.⁵ The problem of identification – shared by contemporary chroniclers and modern historians alike – is compounded by the size of the Herbert clan: both Pembroke and his father, Sir William ap Thomas, had many legitimate sons, and there were numerous bastards.⁶ Accepting Ricart's statement that the Herbert in question was Pembroke's brother does not help, since among the earl's brothers was William (giving the same Christian name to two brothers was not a rare practice in medieval families), Sir Richard of Colebrook, and Thomas. So, there are three contenders for the Herbert murdered in Bristol: William, Richard, and Thomas. Who were they?

A William Herbert was employed in the Bristol customs house: he was supervisor, or controller, of the scrutiny of the customs from 1462 to 1466. But this William Herbert appears to have survived the cull of his kindred: William Herbert, merchant of Bristol, was granted a licence to trade in October 1471.⁷ Sir Richard Herbert of Colebrook had local interests: in 1464/5 he received the Gloucestershire manors of Lassington, and Netherleigh, in Westbury-on-Trym, forfeited by Sir John Scudamore; but Worcestre and Warkworth agree that he was killed at Edgecote.⁸

This leaves Thomas. The escheator, or royal financial official, for Gloucestershire and the Welsh March was informed of the death of Thomas Herbert esquire in October 1471: delays in issuing such notifications were not rare, and given the confusion that engulfed England between 1469 and 1471, this could have related to a Thomas Herbert slain after Edgecote. The Thomas Herbert esquire, late sheriff of Somerset and Dorset, whose widow Katherine was sued for debt in early 1472, is probably the same man whose death was notified the previous year.⁹ If this is our victim, then he would have been well-known to those who witnessed his execution. Thomas Herbert, esquire of the body to Edward IV and sheriff of Somerset and Dorset in 1461-2, was a key figure in the royal administration of the West Country: constable of Gloucester castle and a county JP and frequent commissioner, he was also MP for Gloucester in 1467-8. He had been commissioned along with Lord Herbert, future earl of Pembroke, to take ships in Bristol for the king's fleet in March 1462, and it was from Bristol that he sailed on an embassy to Castile later that year. In 1467 he was granted the wardship and marriage of Robert, son and heir of John Poyntz of Iron Acton. According to Rudder's *New History of Gloucestershire*, Thomas Herbert was granted the manors of Dunteshourn Rouse and Longney, forfeited by Thomas and William Mull in 1462/3, and died without male heirs, the manors being granted to Sir Richard Beauchamp in 1474/5.¹⁰ A Thomas Herbert was a Bristol customs collector between 1466 and 1468, but this was probably the son or nephew (Pembroke's son) of his namesake the squire of the body.¹¹

Thomas Herbert senior was the villain of an extraordinary tale told by Thomas Norton, a Bristol customs controller, esquire of Edward IV's household, and prominent alchemist, author of one of the most celebrated English alchemical works, *The Ordinall of Alchimy*.¹² According to Norton's account in the *Ordinall*, written in or after 1477, Herbert had abducted another alchemist, Thomas Dalton, from Tewkesbury Abbey and imprisoned him for four years in the hope that he would produce gold for him; eventually, Herbert decided to execute the alchemist, but Dalton's pious prayers moved him to order his release. According to Norton, Dalton had been spotted by Herbert when he was presented before Edward IV by John Delves, whose clerk he had once been. Delves was another esquire of the household, and a member of Warwick's affinity: he was proclaimed a traitor in April 1471 and lost his head after Edward's victory at Tewkesbury the following month. The identification of Delves with Warwick's man raises the possibility of a factional sub-text to this story: that Herbert's mistreatment of Dalton may have been motivated by the hapless monk's associations as well as his alchemical claims.¹³ However, Norton also says that 'Herberde dyed so[ne] after in his bedde'.¹⁴ Could Norton have confused Thomas the elder with his younger namesake? Whatever the truth behind this tale, it does indicate that Thomas Herbert was not always remembered with affection in Bristol. On balance, it seems safest to agree with Warkworth, and to identify Warwick's victim at Bristol in 1469 with Thomas, brother of William Herbert, earl of Pembroke.

Herbert's execution at Bristol was an early indication of the town's loyalties in the renewal of the Wars of the Roses that followed. A town contingent fought for Lord Berkeley, probably a Warwick supporter, at the battle of Nibley Green in March 1470, and in May of the following year Margaret of Anjou's army was supplied – and possibly reinforced – from the town on its way to fight Edward at Tewkesbury. This battle, on 4 May 1471, spelled the real end for any hopes that Henry VI and Margaret might again reign as king and queen: Clarence had changed sides once more, and his support was crucial to his royal brother's success; Warwick had already been killed at

Barnet the previous month; on the night that Edward returned victorious to London after the battle of Tewkesbury, he ordered Henry VI's murder, and Margaret was left to live out the rest of her life in obscurity. Bristol had to sue for a pardon, from which the ringleaders of its pro-Warwick faction were exempted. Bristol had played a small, but significant, part in one of the most dramatic episodes in England's later medieval history.

- 1 For Pembroke's career, see H.T. Evans, *Wales and the Wars of the Roses* (1998 edn., Sutton, Stroud), *passim*.
- 2 M. Hicks, *Warwick the Kingmaker* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1998), *passim*. For Earls court and the Barton, M. W. Ponsford, 'Bristol Castle: archaeology and the history of a royal fortress', unpublished University of Bristol M.Litt. thesis, 1979), pp 180-92. M. Sharp (ed.), *Accounts of the Constables of Bristol Castle in the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries*, Bristol Record Society, 34 (1982), pp. xxiv, xxxvi-lxiii.
- 3 L. T. Smith (ed), *The Maire of Bristowe is Kalendar*, Camden Society (1872), p. 44.
- 4 J. O. Halliwell (ed), *A Chronicle of the First Thirteen Years of the Reign of King Edward the Fourth*, by John Warkworth, Camden Society (1839), p. 7.
- 5 J. H Harvey (ed.), *William Worcester: Itineraries* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1969), pp. 339-40.
- 6 See the family tree in H.T. Evans, *Wales and the Wars of the Roses* (1998 edn, Sutton), p. 136.
- 7 Evans, *Wales and the Wars of the Roses*, pp. 108, 162; E.W.W. Veale (ed), *The Great Red Book of Bristol*, Text pt 2, Bristol Record Society, 8 (1938), pp. 136. But R. A. Griffiths & R. S. Thomas, *The Principality of Wales in the Later Middle Ages*, I, *South Wales* (University of Wales, Cardiff, 1972), p. 186, identifies several contemporary William Herberts!
- 8 S. Rudder, *A New History of Gloucestershire* (Cirencester, 1779), pp. 517, 794; Evans, *Wales and the Wars of the Roses*, p. 108.
- 9 *C[alendar of] F[ine] R[olls]*, 1471-1485, no.4; N[atational] A[rchives] E13 11 Edward IV, Hillary Term.
- 10 pp. 424, 535; J. C. Wedgwood, *History of Parliament, 1439-1509: Biographies* (HMSO, 1938), pp. 443-4; D. Thomas, 'The Herberts of Raglan as supporters of the House of York in the second half of the fifteenth century' (unpublished University of Wales MA thesis, 1967), pp. 234-7, 239-42, 244, identifies him as Pembroke's brother; *CFR, 1461-71*, p. 190.
- 11 Thomas, 'Herberts of Raglan', pp. 250-1; NA E159 Trinity 6 EIV rot 19; Hillary 9 EIV rot 27; E13 8 EIV Easter – Middlesex ; *CFR, 1461-71*, pp. 178-80. Thomas Herbert the younger was also escheater in Gloucestershire in 1461-2 and 1468-9: *CFR, 1461-71*, pp. 49, 114, 132, 138, 222. Evans, *Wales and the Wars of the Roses*, 135.
- 12 J Reidy (ed), *Thomas Norton's Ordinal of Alchemy*, Early English Text Society, original series, 272 (1975), ll. 926-1012, pp. xxxvii-lix; The identification of the alchemist with the Bristol customer was questioned by M. Nierenstein & P F Chapman, 'Enquiry into the authorship of The Ordinal of Alchemy', *Isis*, 18 (1932), pp. 290-321, but convincingly reasserted in J Reidy, 'Thomas Norton and the *Ordinal of Alchemy*', *Ambix*, 6 (1957), pp. 59-85.
- 13 Wedgwood, *History of Parliament*, pp. 267-8.
- 14 J. Hughes, *Arthurian Myths and Alchemy: The Kingship of Edward IV* (Sutton, Stroud, 2002), pp. 199-201.

This article is adapted from P. Fleming, *Bristol and the Wars of the Roses, 1451-1471*, to be published by the Bristol Branch of the Historical Association in the Autumn.

[caption for image]:

Thomas Norton's international reputation as an alchemist survived into the 17th century: title page of Michael Maier, *Tripus Aureus ...* (1618)

**A 'DETERMINED SUICIDE' AT SLAD
BY RICHARD BOND**



The village of Slad in Gloucestershire is best known as the childhood home, and final resting place, of the poet and author Laurie Lee (1914-1997). His early years were captured, famously, in *Cider with Rosie*, a series of evocative tales of village life and a coming of age set against the backdrop of a fading rural idyll. But *Cider with Rosie* also contains dark tales of superstition and death with Slad itself portrayed as a ‘poor, self-sufficient and still mainly feudal’ village in ‘a half-pagan landscape in which violence and madness were all part of one pastoral mess-pot.’¹

Lee illustrates Slad's darker aspects in the story of the 'private' murder of a man who left the village as a young pauper, packed off to New Zealand, returning to taunt his contemporaries with his new-found wealth, only to be beaten up and left to freeze to death by them, the perpetrators protected by a life-long wall of silence around the tight-knit community. And then there is the 'public' suicide of the fey, ‘flock haired pre-Raphaelite stunner’, Miss Flynn, whose naked body is found in

Jones' pond, the victim of consumption and gossip.²

But some twenty years before the events that Lee would immortalise in *Cider with Rosie*, another death took place in Slad, that of my great great grandfather, John Robert Bond. Although it was not an episode that Lee refers to, it may well have contributed to his vision of the 'violence and madness' of the Slad valley that he is at pains to record. What's more, it took place in the very building where Lee himself spent a large part of his life, the Woolpack Inn.³

In the mid 19th century Stroud was a major centre of the woollen industry, then still a prime driver of the national economy. The area was perfect for the industry with the easy availability of Cotswold wool, the constant supply of water from the River Frome and its numerous tributaries running down steep valleys, and the suitability of the natural salts in the spring water for cleaning and dyeing. It was a boom time around the Stroud valleys, with one of the most rapidly growing populations in Europe. Many people were drawn to the area, and off the land, to work in the mills and associated industries⁴. The occupations of those listed in the mid-19th century censuses for the area are a litany of jobs in the woollen industry: cloth workers, flock workers, mule spinners, wool pickers, wool twiners and winders, hand loom weavers, millwrights, burlers, cloth dyers and dye workers. In Slad alone around two thirds of those whose occupations are recorded in the 1851 census were involved in the woollen industry.⁵

With the growth of the mills and the influx of workers came the infrastructure necessary to support them. Along the narrow Slad valley from Stroud four inns appeared, only one of which, the Woolpack itself, still remains, its very name testifying to the importance of wool to the lives of the villagers. According to the 1851 census for Stroudend Tything (including Slad), John Robert Bond, then 13, was living with his parents Richard and Elizabeth Bond, and already working as a cloth worker.⁶ Richard, a migrant from Devon, is described as a farmer and 'beer seller', although the first record of his incumbency of the Woolpack Inn is not until 1856.⁷ In 1861 he is described as both a cloth worker and a 'publican', but by 1871 he appears only as a 'licenced vituallar' (the evolving terminology itself an indication of the growing importance of the local pub).

Richard remained the landlord of the Woolpack until his death in 1877, when his second wife, another Elizabeth, took over the role in partnership with his eldest surviving son, John Robert. Along with his wife, Emma, and their six young children, John ran the pub with his stepmother while also working at the Strap Works in Stroud.⁸

According to the evidence of his daughter Eliza to the later inquest, on 11 February 1898, the 58 year old landlord slipped on a piece of wood as he was entering the back kitchen of the pub and fell, 'the back of his head coming into contact with the ground'.⁹ As a result, 'he suffered great pain in his head and had been very strange in his manner'. Despite receiving medical attention (there being no visible wound, he was prescribed a 'tonic' for his pain by Doctor Fergusson of Painswick), he returned to work. But his family recalled that he had seemed 'very depressed and scarcely spoke to anyone' in the weeks after his accident. Eliza reported that 'he looked wild at times and concluded that people were always talking about him and remarking that he ought to be kept under restraint'. He had even declared to his daughter that 'if my head does not get better I shall go mad'.

On the morning of 19 March, a few days after Doctor Fergusson had visited John Robert and concluded that he 'would probably require no further medical attendance', Eliza discovered her father in an outbuilding at the back of the

Woolpack, 'lying in a pool of blood'. According to the evidence of the local constable, PC Spicer, 'his throat was badly cut, he had a razor clenched firmly in his right hand. The instrument was covered in congealed blood'. Doctor Fergusson was called to examine the body. He found that the jugular vein was completely severed, concluding that 'death would have been instantaneous'. After being advised by the doctor that such an action could reasonably be considered commensurate with the after effects of a severe blow on the head, and on the recommendation of the coroner, the inquest jury passed a verdict of 'suicide whilst temporarily insane'. His death certificate records the cause of death as 'cut throat whilst of unsound mind'.

The Woolpack Inn continued to be run by Elizabeth Bond until her death in 1900 when it was taken over by the Stroud Brewery, just a few years before Laurie Lee's mother, Annie, abandoned by her husband, moved to Slad to raise her young family. By this time the Bond family had left the village, a reflection, perhaps, of the declining cloth industry in the Stroud valleys, out-competed by foreign imports and superseded by heavier industries. My great grandfather, William, took his cloth working skills to Bristol to establish a tailor's business in Victoria Street, the story of his father's unfortunate end being quickly forgotten (only resurfacing as the result of recent family history research).

Lee's poetic evocation of a village consumed by ancient lore, which he likens to 'a cave whose shadows were cluttered by spirits and by laws still vaguely ancestral', suggests that suicide was not uncommon, nor especially shameful. Those poor souls like tragic Miss Flynn were, according to Lee, 'never censured, but were spoken about in a special voice as though their actions raised them above the living and defeated the misery of the world'. Whether this is true of John Robert, we cannot say, but Lee's account of the suicidal tendencies of the locals provides a grimly wry commentary on the subject:

The wet winter days seemed at times unending, and quite often they led to self-slaughter. Girls jumped down wells, young men cut their veins, spinsters locked themselves up and starved.. ...such outbursts were often contagious and could lead to waves of throat-cutting; indeed, during one particularly gloomy season even the coroner did himself in.¹⁰

- 1 Cover notes for the original edition of Laurie Lee's *Cider with Rosie* (Hogarth Press, 1959).
- 2 See *ibid.*, chapter 6, 'Public Death, Private Murder'.
- 3 According to Geoff Sandles (see n. 6 below), in his later years Lee would sit in the Woolpack garden in the summer and use his mobile phone to order another pint of his favourite ale. The landlord had to let the phone ring twice and not pick it up. He would then take Lee's beer out to him.
- 4 For a more detailed account of the history of the woollen industry in Gloucestershire see, for example, *The Woollen Industry in the Cotswolds* at www.grahamthomas.com/history and Jennifer Tann, *Gloucestershire Woollen Mills* (David and Charles, 1967)
- 5 Stroudend Tything 1851 Census (Painswick Parish), Gloucestershire, enumerator Edward Hewlett
- 6 *Ibid.*, number 17.
- 7 Geoff Sandles, *Gloucestershire Pubs* at www.gloucestershirepubs.co.uk.
- 8 I am indebted to a distant cousin, Raymond Bond, for much of the family information, some of which appeared in his short piece on 'Bond Family History' in the *Gloucestershire Family History Society Journal*, vol. 51 (December 1991).
- 9 A report of the Coroner's inquest appeared in *the Stroud News* on 1st April 1898 under the title 'Determined Suicide at Slad'.
- 10 *Cider with Rosie*, Chapter 6, 'Public death, private murder'.

OLDBURY COURT: THE PLACE AND THE PEOPLE

BY ANTHONY NOTT

The Oldbury Court Park and housing estate is situated about 3.5 miles from the centre of the city of Bristol. It has a recorded history dating back to 1086 and the core of the original Domesday land holding has remained remarkably clear of development for over 900 years. Its proximity to Bristol has inevitably meant that throughout its long history it has been intimately connected with the economic and social development of Bristol.

The pre-history of the Oldbury Court area is difficult to determine due to lack of archaeological excavation on or near the original house site and the extensive alterations to the ground caused by 18th and early 19th century landscaping and 20th century housing development. But the survival of the original Saxon name of Oldbury (the old fortified place) suggests a possible late bronze age or iron age embanked farmstead as the original settlement on the site. The first historical mention of the Oldbury site appears in Domesday Book when a riding man is shown as holding a carucate of land (a taxation unit of roughly 120 acres) in 1066 as part of the royal manor of Barton Regis which also included the hamlets of Easton, Stapleton and Mangotsfield. Riding men were free men of fairly low status who were usually found on the estates of large landowners, mostly royal or ecclesiastical. The Oldbury riding man was exempt from labour services and was the only man as such designated in the Barton, his job being probably to carry messages for the reeve. Throughout the medieval period until the mid fourteenth century there are many references to the activities of the holder of Oldbury: in the roll of rents and services for Stapleton which has survived for the year 1294-5, among the free tenants is John of Oldbury holding one carucate of land by tenure of sergeanty which consisted of 'carrying the king's writs, summonses and letters of the Constable of Bristol (Castle) within the county of Gloucester at his own costs'.

By 1402 the manor of Barton had become much depleted with only 40 acres being under the direct control of the Constable of the castle with much of the peripheral land leased out to local landowners. Oldbury was affected by this change and by 1429 was part of the estates of William Doddisham the younger, a lawyer from Cannington in Somerset and MP for Bridgwater with a legal practice which extended to Bristol. However, by 1485 one third of Oldbury was in the hands of the Kemys family that had originated in South Monmouthshire and become established in Gloucestershire by 1422 at the latest. The core of the Oldbury estate was to remain with the Kemys family until 1667. The rest of Oldbury was in the hands of other men: a surviving rent roll of 1498 shows land at Oldbury as part of the land portfolio of the wealthy Bristol merchant, Philip Grene, sheriff of Bristol in 1499/1500 whose daughter Joanna was married to John Kemys of Oldbury. Grene was also shown as owning two mills on the River Frome, which had been under the control of the Constable of Bristol castle during the earlier medieval period, one of which Oldbury mills was rented from him by John Kemys. Between 1485 and 1667 the Kemys family rebuilt Oldbury House with its three gables and gradually added land to the estate. By 1667 most of the original 11th century estate had been recovered. In 1667 Isabella Collett, the last surviving Kemys, sold 74.5 acres of land at Oldbury, including the house, to the Bristol glover Robert Winstone.

Winstone lived and carried on his business in what was later to be called the

Dutch House on the corner of High Street and Wine Street which he leased from 1676. His business obviously prospered for he was able to purchase part of Oldbury in 1667 for £1410 and in 1668 bought the tithes of corn and hay belonging to the rectory of Stapleton for an additional £50. Part of his capital may have come from shrewd investments in the fast developing West Indian trade and his son Thomas was able by 1696 to move to the more fashionable address of St James Back and cease living over the shop. Thomas caused somewhat of a stir in Quaker circles by clandestinely marrying Hannah Dowell the Quaker daughter of a wealthy Bristol glover, and consequently played a leading part in the Society for the Reformation of Manners in Bristol. More importantly he embarked on a programme of building up his Oldbury Court estate, buying by 1715 the land on both sides of the River Frome which is part of the park today. His son, another Thomas Winstone, was then able to call himself a gentleman instead of a glover, reside at Oldbury House, enlarge the south wing and develop the land to the rear of the house as a pleasure garden while letting out the land in front of the house to local farmers. He was also able to take part in local activities, become a churchwarden of Stapleton church and a trustee of the new charity school in Fishponds founded by a bequest from Mary Webb in 1729, and was instrumental in the appointment of Jacob More, the father of Hannah More as schoolmaster there. Winstone died in 1760 and after his widow Albinia's death in 1769 the estate reverted to her nephew, William Hayward Winstone, who systematically mortgaged the estate during the next twenty years to finance his Bath lifestyle and finally sold it to his major creditors, three Bristol merchants, in 1798. In October 1799 Thomas Graeme, who had leased Oldbury from Hayward Winstone since 1794, bought the Oldbury estate from the new owners for £9000.

Graeme described recently as a 'West Indian sugar baron' from Barbados, with estates there and in Grenada, was keen to remodel the estate grounds and in 1800 called in Humphrey Repton, who during the next three years made substantial changes in the layout and character of the grounds around the house. Repton was surprised that such a piece of undivided property unaffected by the 'buildings, manufactories and nuisance of every description inseparable from a commercial city' should exist so near the city of Bristol. Repton was able to eradicate field boundaries in front of the house to create a new vista of parkland and build a new carriageway from the Frenchay entrance to the estate that was enhanced by a rustic gatekeepers lodge. Various extra features were added such as a declivity at the rear of the house to provide a view over the Frome valley, and a rustic bridge across the river to give access to a newly built rustic cottage on the north bank called Glenfroom cottage, used by Graeme's nephew and heir Valentine Jones. The south wing of the house was further extended on the west to give a view across the Frome valley to the occupants.

Graeme died in 1820, followed by his heir, Valentine Jones, in 1833, and the property eventually passed to the Vassall family, relatives of Graeme's sister Margaret. The family were descended from French Huguenots who had emigrated from England to America in the 17th century and had been forced to return to England after the American Revolution because of their loyalist sympathies. The Vassalls held the estate until 1936, when having no male heir Harry Graeme Vassall decided to sell the estate to Bristol Corporation, who wished to use the land for 'an open space and playing fields', reserving land to the south for housing. However the war intervened and although the land was put to good use growing crops the house inevitably deteriorated. A fire in 1948 severely damaged the coach house and burnt down the stable, and less than a month later lead was stolen from the roof. An architect's report revealed the decay of the main house structure, irreparably damaged by 'a widespread

and devastating attack by dry rot fungus, death-watch beetle and woodworm' and recommended demolition. The Public Works Committee of the City Council, despite wanting to keep the house, did not have the funds to restore it and by February 1949 it had been demolished. The other buildings of the Graeme/Repton collaboration disappeared at the same time, except Glenroom Cottage that had been burnt by suffragettes. Since 1949 the park has become a major leisure area for local people and as such has fulfilled the original aspirations of the City Council in 1936. Unfortunately the house site has been allowed to become a vehicle depot and maintenance area and is unsightly, while next to it a 1960s changing room block lies derelict. Heavy tree planting has also destroyed some of Repton's park vistas, but quite amazingly an early mediaeval site, not engulfed by housing, remains as a living resource, and its ownership by Bristol City Council as heir to the manor of Barton, is an excellent example of continuity of ownership for nearly a thousand years.

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A SOLDIER'S LETTERS BY BARRY WILLIAMSON

Chasing red herrings has always been one of my problems. But you never know where a red herring will lead! In the Spring Term of 2001 I was more weary than usual of teaching the Causes, Course and Consequences of the First World War to my Year 9 class at Bristol Grammar School. I therefore decided we should take a diversion from the main syllabus and investigate one name chosen at random from the 121 names on the War Memorial in the Great Hall. The aim was to write the story of that soldier's life. We chose Stanley Charles Booker. It was fairly easy to collect a wallet of material about Booker from the school archives, the Central Library and the Worcestershire Regiment Museum. There were obviously many gaps but the pupils made a good job of the task and appeared to enjoy it.

There it should have ended but some pupils insisted that we ought to search for any Bookers still living in Bristol who might be related to Stanley and have 'things about him stored in a cupboard.' I did my best to pour cold water on such a time-consuming enquiry but was won over when one pupil said optimistically: 'It's all on the internet Sir; my Mum gets loads of family history from there.' In fact, the internet was unhelpful and we began a long search by letter and telephone that lasted

over 6 months. None of the family survives in Bristol and every enquiry produced a blank until we discovered that an old neighbour of the Booker family from Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, still lives in Bristol. We asked her if she knew what had happened to the family. She remembered there were three Booker brothers, of whom two survived the war and that Mrs. Booker had moved as an old lady to live with one of them in a big house in Easton. Big houses in Easton did not seem to ring true but she insisted: 'I was taken by my father to visit Mrs. Booker in her new home. My clearest memory is of going by train from Montpelier Station to the next stop at Stapleton Road and then we walked to a large house not too far away.' Could it be the Vicarage? Street directories showed that a Rev. Walter Booker was living at St. Mark's Vicarage, Easton from 1939 to the early 1950s. This was a breakthrough. A search in Crockford's followed, we had details of his career and then another blank wall. We needed to know if Walter had left children who might have kept family papers.

I then turned to an old friend who has an encyclopaedic knowledge of the 20th century Anglican church in Bristol. He said that a Miss Dorothy Mills remembered Mr Booker and she suggested we contact the Rev. Bryan Jones who worked in Easton in the 1950s. He knew that Walter was Stanley's brother (he had talked about a brother killed in the Great War), had also been at BGS and had been a bachelor. When he died in the early 70s he left some books to Mr. Jones who remembered that the Executor of his will was a distant cousin from somewhere in Devon, possibly Exeter. Could we find a copy of the will? A visit to the Bristol Probate Office produced the most efficient service of any public office I've ever visited - a search on microfiche for the exact date of death of the Rev. Walter Booker (14 April 1974) and a reference number; then a copy of the will was produced within 8 minutes.

The letter of administration attached to the will gave a Bristol solicitor as executor and John Bosanko of St. Luke's College, Exeter: luckily an unusual name. Was he still alive and living in Exeter? The telephone directories in the Central Library revealed nothing for the Exeter district but a J. Bosanko in Paignton. The last enquiry ... yes, he was a distant cousin of the Booker brothers, none of whom had any children. He had the family papers and these included:

- Stanley's letters home from training and from the front
- Family photos
- School magazines
- Official army papers
- Letters from Cyril Norwood, ex Headmaster of BGS, to the family
- Postcards
- Cap badges

A visit to Paignton quickly revealed that these were not normal bread and butter letters, mentioning only the weather and food and family matters. Stanley wrote long, descriptive letters to his mother almost every week from the time he became an officer in the Worcestershire Regiment in March 1915 until the week before he was killed at Richebourg-l'Avoue on the Western Front on October 10th 1916. After Stanley reached France in May 1916 he spent a total of 57 days in the front trenches, on 11 separate occasions and the rest of the time training, marching, bathing and resting behind the lines. He won the MC and was recommended for the VC. The total number of words was 75000. They are the letters of an ordinary soldier, weary with the long months of training but keen to do his duty and convinced that a man's place

was at the front, in order to teach Germany that the strong should not bully the weak. There is none of the weariness or cynicism that we recognise as the norm after the Somme disaster. How far Stanley was self-censoring the news to protect his mother, we cannot tell.

John and Mary Bosanko very kindly agreed to deposit all the papers on permanent loan to the School Archives office and although they came too late to be used by the class of 2001, they have been an invaluable resource with other classes. In November 2003, an edited collection of the letters was published: *Dear Mother ... Great War Letters from a Bristol Soldier* (Redcliffe Press, ISBN 1904537073), £7.99.