

VCH Shropshire Annual Report 2021-2

The VCH Shropshire County Committee has pleasure in presenting its report for 2021-2.

Over the past year we have done a great deal to recover ground lost during the pandemic year. Research is a continuing process which does not divide up neatly into annual reports. Some of the achievements we report here properly fall into the year 2022-3 but we shall allude to them here.

Shrewsbury

The full version of the *Gazetteer of Nonconformist chapels and congregations* to which we referred in last year's report was finally published on the website in February. The Gazetteer was largely the work of Dr Rosemary Thornes, Lyn Leach (both of whom have now left the district) and Jonathan Davies and builds on earlier work by Janice Cox. It is the nature of things that we have accumulated some corrections, and found some additional material and we invite others to send us corrections and new material to be incorporated. There will be a revised and (slightly) expanded version in the future

Our major effort over the year has been on the parish churches, and despite the optimism expressed in last year's report that some of it would be posted in 2021, it is only now coming to fruition. The first draft text will be published on the website between the end of year and the Annual Meeting. By way of excuse, these are large texts – we would expect the whole to run to about 250 pages and a similar number of illustrations. The first to appear will be St Chad's: Holy Cross and St Giles is about finalised and will follow shortly after. Again, these will have to be revised in the future to take account of any relevant materials at the Staffordshire Record Office which, as many will know, has been closed since the beginning of 2022 for building works.

The text is the work of Dr Judith Everard (History) and Wendy Horton (buildings). Dr Everard was able to draw on old draft text by Dr Penny Upton, but the text being published has been extensively re-researched and Ms Horton's text is entirely new. We are grateful to both Judith Everard and Wendy Horton for their excellent work.

The first accounts of the 'new' churches of the town (those built after c.1820) were received from Dr Penny Harris.

Two other sections are either published on the website or are about to be: the account of public monuments (Professor Hoyle) and that on Municipal Buildings (Wendy Horton with sections by the late Bill Champion and Dr Upton).

The major outstanding challenge is to complete the buildings and townscapes section of the volume. An application to a charity for funding to work on the twentieth-century townscape was regrettably unsuccessful. We invite suggestions as to where we might find donors to support this part of the project.

Newport

We have been advancing on several fronts at Newport in conjunction with colleagues in the Newport History Society.

On medieval Newport, we received a grant from the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society to allow Dr Everard to work on the charter and other materials for medieval Newport. (A small grant towards travel and publication expenses was also made by the Marc Fitch Fund.) This will result in a freestanding publication but is essential

foundational work for the account of medieval Newport which will appear in the VCH Newport history.

Professor Hoyle has worked extensively on the Talbot surveys by William Hill in Shropshire Archives and has located other material relating to the family. This will result in an edition of the records which will appear in the winter of 2022-3. He discussed the landscape of Newport, Longford and Church Aston and showed the contribution that the Hill surveys make to our understanding of it in a lecture in Newport on 2 April.

Professor Hoyle has also been gathering material on the history of the town, including on the troubled relationship of the Talbots of Longford and the borough (the Talbots were inclined to think that the borough had no legal standing, or at least to deny that it did). We expect much of this to be published on the website in the next few months.

A start was made on the buildings and townscapes of the town. We are pleased to record a grant from the Pagett Fund of the Wrekin Historical Group which will be devoted to this. A start was delayed by the promise of other funding which did not, in the event, materialise. Ms Horton is working with the Newport Historical Society, beginning with the public houses of the town.

We have also over the year seen the beginning of work on the Liddle and Heane deposits at Shropshire Archives. This will make future research much easier. Professor Hoyle finally got to see the Newport Market Company deeds.

On one important issue, we failed to make any progress. Shropshire Archives has no Building Development Plans for any of the predecessor councils to Telford and Wrekin. The appearance is that at some time they were all concentrated in the hands of Telford and Wrekin Council. However, the council does not know where the pre-1974 building plans are or even if they still have them and the suspicion is that at some time they have been destroyed. We continue to press on this, but as things stand it seems unlikely that they will be recovered and made available to researchers.

Publications

We have continued to add draft text to the website. The next anticipated publication (which will not in a strict sense be a VCH Shropshire publication) will be the Talbot Surveys which will be a joint venture between the List and Index Society and the Newport History Society and will appear in the winter of 2022-23.

Transcription

The prime transcription project over the year has been the five surviving volumes of the *Salopian Annals* written by Henry Pidgeon. We are grateful to Peter Overall and Nicola Bramah-Taylor for their work transcribing this, but most especially to Mrs Janice Cox who undertook the larger share. The whole text has also been read back against the originals by Tony Carr, and our debt to him is considerable too. Pidgeon took a keen interest in the buildings of the town and of course he wrote at a time when the existing churches were being refurbished and new churches proposed and built. He is therefore an importance witness to how these buildings were altered and erected, and his *Salopian Annals* have provided Dr Everard and Ms Horton with valuable materials.

Mrs Cox is also transcribing the two memoranda books of David Parkes – the older man who appears to have been a mentor to Pidgeon in his antiquarian interests. These are somewhat different in character to Pidgeon's *Annals*, but again they contain much important material on the town at a time of change.

When copyright permissions have been agreed with Shropshire Archives, this material will appear on our website. We also envisage a half-day conference on Pidgeon in the winter of 2022-3.

We would be interested to hear from anyone who would like to take a share in transcribing Shrewsbury materials: there is much to do!

Personnel

We have no changes in the officers or in the membership of the County Committee to report, but as in previous years, the committee would like to extend an invitation to anyone committed to our aims to join us. We would particularly welcome new members who would be willing to handle publicity for us, take charge of fundraising or manage volunteers.

Funding

As in previous years we have annexed the accounts to this report. It would appear that we had a large balance at the year end although much of this is committed and will be paid out on the completion of work already contracted with our researchers.

The Walker Trust kindly renewed their grant to us at the beginning of the calendar year. We also received a grant from the Pagett Fund of the Wrekin Historical Group towards our work on Newport. The Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society made us a grant of £10,000 for the project on the Newport charters and other medieval materials. The Marc Fitch Fund made a small supplementary contribution towards the costs of this project. We remain grateful to all our donors for their support in thin times.

We have also received small sums from our supporters for which we are also grateful: we would hope that over time many more people would set up standing orders to our benefit, make occasional gifts or even make bequests to us in their wills. We can only go so fast as the limited funding allows us.

R. W. Hoyle
Chair, VCH Shropshire
29 October 2022