

## Victoria County History Shropshire Annual Report 2022-3

The VCH Shropshire County Committee has pleasure in presenting its report for 2022-3.

In this year our focus has largely been on Newport but the account of our activities begins, as usual, with Shrewsbury.

### *Shrewsbury*

Earlier in the year we posted the text for two sections of the second Shrewsbury volume, 'Municipal buildings' and 'Public monuments'. But our chief work over the winter was finalising the draft accounts of the five medieval parish churches of the town together with their supporting images. To have completed this has given great satisfaction. Subsequent work has focused on the account of Roman Catholics and Shrewsbury Cathedral: this was posted soon after the year end. The account of the twentieth-century Roman Catholic church in Shrewsbury will follow later. Other sections of the Shrewsbury volume were in draft at the year end and will follow later in 2023.

### *Newport*

The whole of the VCH team has contributed to our work on Newport this year. Judith Everard has been working on an edition of medieval Newport records (to c. 1550) on a project funded by the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society, with additional help from the Marc Fitch Fund, to whom thanks are due. Newport materials are widely dispersed. Some have found their way to Raby Castle in county Durham where Judith Everard and Richard Hoyle spent a couple of days in October and Richard Hoyle had occasion to return again in February. On both occasions they were hosted by the newly appointed estate archivist, Gabriel Damaszk who eased our way through the largely uncatalogued collections. With her research in the various archives now complete, Judith has produced a text which contains some 500 items and extends to 200 pages of typescript. The earliest charter discovered is tentatively dated to about 1200.

Wendy Horton has been working with the Newport History Society on their project (funded by Newport Town Council) to look at the Inns of Newport and their standing buildings. Twelve buildings have been examined in detail and Wendy has been lending support to the Society's members in the measurement and interpretation of the standing fabric. At the very end of the year she began work on the architectural history of Newport parish church.

Richard Hoyle has been quietly drafting text on aspects of the history of the town, but what he has been up to will only be revealed over the next year.

We have been very grateful over the year to have had the research assistance of Lorraine Heighway who has made two trawls through the minutes of the Newport Urban District Council extracting information for us including on planning applications received by the council. We continued our attempts to track down the building development plans received by Newport UDC and the other local authorities subsumed into Telford and Wrekin council, but we now have compelling evidence that they were destroyed some thirty years ago.

Judith Everard was due to lecture to the SAHS on the Newport project in January, but this was deferred when the Severn threatened to flood the venue. The lecture will now take place in November 2023. On a happy note, Judith Everard and Richard Hoyle and other members of the county committee attended the fortieth anniversary celebrations of the Newport History Society in May.

### *Meetings*

We held our annual meeting on 29 October where we heard a lecture on Archery by Advolly Richmond. Not only was this enormous fun, it also opened up a whole world of middle class leisure activity of which few of us were aware. Competative archery offered opportunities for men and women to meet socially and for the younger ones to flirt and court. Advolly's lecture concentrated on Shropshire and the houses of the Marches and was very much appreciated.

With the Friends of Shropshire Archives, we held a morning conference at Shropshire Archives on Henry Pidgeon and his world on 14 February. This was a celebration of the completion of the transcription of his *Salopian Annals*. A good crowd came together to hear a series of lectures about aspects of Shrewsbury in the 1820s and early 1830s seen through Pidgeon's eyes. The complete transcripts of the *Annals* can be found at [www.vchshropshire.org/Salopian\\_Annals.html](http://www.vchshropshire.org/Salopian_Annals.html).

### *Publications*

We have continued to add draft text with the supporting illustrations to the website as and when it is prepared.

The chief publication over the year though is not strictly a VCH one, but is Professor Hoyle's edition of the Hill surveys for Longford, Church Aston and Newport, together with other 'estate' records of the Talbot family of Longford up to the sale of the estates by the fifteenth earl of Shrewsbury in 1787-8. A long introduction identifies Hill, outlines the history of the Talbots (and latterly the earls of Shrewsbury) at Longford and discusses what the Hill survey and its maps tell us about the landscape. Hill's maps are reproduced in full colour. At the very end of the year a further section of the Hill survey turned up, having, of all things, been donated to a hospice in Huddersfield. This covers the Herefordshire estates of the Talbots.

### *Transcription*

The transcription of Henry Pidgeon's *Salopian Annals* was finalised during the year. So too was the transcription of the two volumes of memoranda and obituaries kept by Pidgeon's mentor and friend, David Parkes in the years 1816 to 1828 (when Parkes died). Parkes is much less interested than Pidgeon on developments in the town, having more of a county perspective. Indeed, it may be said that he had a cloying attitude to the county gentry. But his is an equally interesting and rewarding perspective. We have already drawn on Pidgeon in our research. A number of hands had a share in the transcription of the *Salopian Annals* but chiefly Janice Cox, and she did the whole of Parkes' *Memoranda*. Tony Carr read the whole of Pidgeon and Parkes back against the original manuscripts in Shropshire Archives. Again, we are very much in their debt.

Mrs Cox has also transcribed two sets of extracts from the lost Borough minute books, one by an anonymous copyist and in Shropshire Archives and the other by James Bowen (d. 1774 and held in the Bodleian Library). As with Pidgeon and Parkes, transcription makes accessible much material which would not otherwise be found. Mrs Cox's transcripts are still being processed but again our debt to her for undertaking the task is considerable.

### *Personal*

Cathryn Ross-Talbot stood down as secretary at the beginning of 2023. After a sort hiatus we were pleased to recruit as her placement Fiona Sheridan who had recently moved to Newport after a career in heritage management in Stafford. Fiona helps to maintain our close relationship with the Newport History Society.

We remain interested to hearing from those in sympathy with our aims who would either like to join the committee or undertake research for us.

### *Funding*

We received grants from the Walker Trust and from the John Pagett Trust during the year, both of them continuing their support from previous years. We also received a very important gift of £6,000 from a private donor to whom we are enormously grateful. The Pagett grant and the private donor's money are both for work on Newport which, as we have seen, is now underway. We also claimed a grant from the previous year from the Marc Fitch Trust which was also for the costs of the Newport charters project.

We welcome modest monthly donations by standing order. Our Treasurer made a claim for gift aid which also yielded a useful sum. Please do consider supporting us in this way.

As we have said in previous annual reports, the speed at which we can progress towards achieving our aims depends on the money available to us. In 2023-4 we would especially welcome donations to help us finish our work on Wem Rural and perhaps undertake research on Whixall (which might otherwise be overlooked). But the major challenge for us in the history of Shrewsbury is to prepare the section on the building history and history of the built environment of the town, including the campaigns to save individual buildings and the character of the town, and the pioneering rescue archaeology undertaken here. We would be looking for perhaps £60,000 to employ one or two researchers. We would welcome donations to help us, and we would welcome suggestions of donors.

23 October 2023

ver. 4