

Research Bulletin No 2

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Did you know that Leckhampton once had a thriving pottery and several brickworks? And its own 18-hole Golf Course? Or that Colonel Elwes of Leckhampton Court used to run a pack of Foxhounds? Or that there was once a Reading Room and Lending Library in what is now the Electricity Substation in Moorend Road?

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Editorial

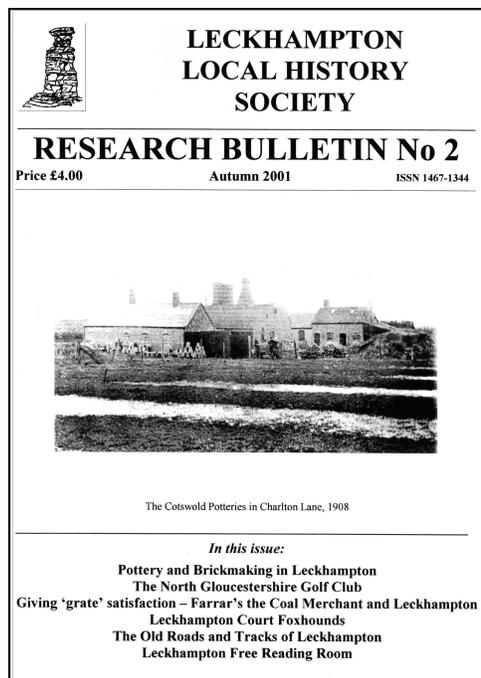
Ideally, local history should be concerned with more than the immediate locality. It may deal with a particular parish but that does not mean it has to be parochial in spirit. Its relationship to the history of the nation is like that of a regional dialect to a language. It should avoid introspection and always have an eye to the world beyond. Though inevitably describing events that occur within limited confines, it should be capable of serving as a model for the country at large at a particular time: England in microcosm. I sincerely hope that the articles that follow in this, the second of our Research Bulletins, meet these criteria.

The account of potteries and brickmaking in Leckhampton not only reveals connections with Winchcombe, Cranham and Hereford. It also includes information to be found in the Norfolk County Record Office, thanks to entries in the indexes to research bulletins produced by our neighbouring society at Charlton Kings. (The real link, of course, is that the Countess of Walsingham owned land at Leckhampton.) The Webb brothers - coal merchants, with varied business interests - who eventually took over one of the brickworks, were also behind the 'North Gloucestershire Golf Club', together with another coal merchant, William Farrar. The course was visited by professional players of national standing and will have reflected a general rise in the popularity of the game in the early 20th century. The account of the Leckhampton Court foxhounds points to a connection with the Berkeley Hunt, which reminds us of a much earlier relationship between the families at Berkeley Castle and Leckhampton Court.

The examination of the ancient roads and tracks as they pass through Leckhampton sheds light on their role and importance to the whole of Gloucestershire and the south-west. Owen Stinchcombe offered me his article on the Free Reading Room some years ago after he had seen mention of the Leckhampton Branch Library in the Society's earlier books, '1894 the End of an Era' and 'Leckhampton Yesteryear'. He is well known as a member of the Gotherington Local History Society, and his article is a by-product of his more general research into working men's clubs in the Cheltenham area.

Local history is also more than sentimental nostalgia. Preferably, it should be put to some practical purpose (as well as being used in support of objections to proposed building on greenfield sites). It is therefore gratifying to report that as a result of sales of 'Britain in Old Photographs: Leckhampton', we have been able to make donations amounting to some £300 divided more or less equally between the Cobalt Unit, the Village Hall Fund, St Peter's Organ Appeal and the Sue Ryder Care Home at Leckhampton Court. This last cause seems particularly deserving, occupying as it does our historic manor house. This is therefore an appropriate time to announce that the Society plans next year to bring out a history of the building and its occupants: 'Leckhampton Court : from Manor House to Hospice'. Considerable interest has already been shown in the project, not least by the American descendants of the emigrants William and Francis Norwood. All profits from sales will go towards Sue Ryder Care.

Local history is not just for the benefit of our contemporaries. We must look after the interests of posterity. It is partly with them in mind that a few volunteers from the Society have been interviewing 'old inhabitants' with a view to recording their memories of past Leckhampton (would that some more would come forward to share this enjoyable pursuit!) A local history society serves as a focus for documents and records that might otherwise have risked destruction or sale to private collectors (where they might be squirrelled away without being seen by the public at large). The articles that follow have been enhanced by chance finds among material offered to us. A unique map defined the area of the golf course, on which someone probably one of its developers - gave a rough outline of the positions of the tees and greens.



Incidental information on the public life of two of the local potters came to light in some minutes of the vestry meetings from the turn of the 19th-20th centuries, previously thought to have been lost. Even more extraordinary is the story of how examples of local pottery were uncovered when the house of the former pottery-owner was demolished. Yet, I suggest that many cases of apparent serendipity are not simply the product of chance combined with vigilance on the researcher's part. They are fostered by publishing the results of one's labours and by making one's interests known to the general public. It is always a pleasure to be approached out of the blue by someone offering a piece of information, a photograph or an object of interest.

Finally, research is of necessity a lonely task, but opportunities for collaboration should be sought. For that reason, it is a healthy development that a small group of members of the Society have been cataloguing a collection of documents found after the death of another member. The County Record Office or Local Studies Centre will be the final resting-place for most of the material, but not before it has been pored over and written up. The next Research Bulletin will reveal some of the contents of this archive.