



THE WOOLHOPE NATURALISTS' FIELD CLUB

Registered Charity No. 521000

NEWSLETTER NO. 50 SPRING 2025

FROM OUR PRESIDENT

As I look out from my upper-floor window over Bartonsham meadows, writing the first words of the Club's half-century newsletter edition, I ponder a little on the history of these beautiful 100 acres (or 40 hectares in modern language). Our house in Park Street was built in the 1860s as one of the Hereford Freehold Land Society's many developments. The immediate southward-facing landscape has associations with both the cathedral and its school, which I had the privilege in another age to lead for 18 years. The 'Scotch row ditch', from which line the Scottish army laid siege to the cathedral and city in 1645, lies at the bottom of the garden; the meadow itself, perhaps part of the cathedral demesne in medieval times, was explored as a site for the school's playing-fields before Wyese was acquired in 1882; and beyond it, the slopes towards Dinedor where, according to that fine Victorian lyricist F.E. Weatherly OH, 'deep orchards' once nestled, were the scenes of many a paper-chase for cathedral boys prior to the Great War. In the last century, too, the meadows became a dairy farm, tenanted from the Church Commissioners by three generations of the Matthews family.

This important lung for the city has now been leased by the Herefordshire Wildlife Trust and is being transformed into a nature reserve: half laid to flower-rich meadows, the remainder to the restoration of traditional hay-cutting and grazing. Plants like Meadowsweet, Yarrow and Lady's Smock, and birds rare to the county, including the Grasshopper Warbler, have been recently recorded here. Although, in late February, it is a little early to spot the bird or indeed hear much of the dawn chorus, as the sun streams today through my study blinds, it seems - after a month of almost continuous rain and cold - that spring is in the air to lift our spirits.

But over the past six months since my last report, as we descended from late autumn into winter gloom, there have been compensations for me in the ongoing work of the Woolhope Club. One highlight was the Woolhope Club conference in the delightful setting of College Hall, Hereford Cathedral, which we held on 8 October, exactly 150 years on from the opening of the Free Library and Museum in Broad Street. I am grateful for the support of the 85 people who attended this commemoration of a special day in the city's history.

Events like these speak powerfully of the popularity, vitality and value of local history, and I hope that in the future – and not least during the celebration of the Club's 175th anniversary in 2026-27, for which preliminary planning has started - we may champion similar occasions, reflecting other areas of our concern. Our town hall lectures have also been well attended, with audiences of 50 to 80 people on Saturday afternoons, and importantly (thanks to our membership secretary) now well heard in a difficult acoustic. This is fitting, for our speakers have not only included local experts in a range of fields, but also three distinguished professors with impressive reputations in archaeology or geology. I look forward too to hearing Lucinda Orr who, having valued the Herefordshire Hoard for the Exchequer, will take a different approach on its discovery. Then there is an excellent range of summer field trips for us to enjoy, as outlined in the enclosed brochure. Early booking is recommended! In addition, the Club is running exciting events at HARC in May as part of the first Herefordshire Histories Festival; please see p.11 and the back page of this newsletter and also the poster about a further event at Moccas Church.

And so, to the Woolhope club-room and library. I explained in my talk of 8 October that the strong links between the Club and the Broad Street building have been in place from the very outset. As was resolved at the annual meeting on 23 February 1871 (and later attested by both the public and the city corporation), 'a separate and private room' for WNFC purposes was to be established for the use of club members, as well as 'other societies ...willing to subscribe to it'. A 'good scientific library' was also to be created in the room. All this was in recognition of James Rankin's generosity as the Woolhope president - he gave over £6,000 for its building and is rightly regarded as its founding-father - and the Club's importance in devising the scheme adopted for the new library and museum. It is, therefore, of critical importance that while the Broad Street edifice is being rebuilt, the Woolhope Club should be involved in both our library's temporary removal and the reconstruction of the club-room. To this end, we have recently made huge efforts to preserve our most precious physical asset by removing the most valuable books to safe storage within the vaults at HARC, the rest of the collection (mostly runs of periodicals) being moved to the strong room in the town hall basement, at the suggestion of the Council's team and with their help. The move of the HARC items was undertaken by Harwell's, a specialist firm in this type of work, and with the generous assistance of Rhys Griffith, the senior archivist at the record office. I am immensely grateful to all involved and to committee members who helped in this delicate operation, especially our two librarians, Jackie Jonson and Marianne Percival. Jackie has recently retired from her services to the Club after 30 years as an officer, committee member, and highly skilled librarian. A tribute to her outstanding contribution appears on p.5 below.

Although the Woolhope room itself is unlikely to be reopened for at least two years, we have already been consulting about its future design with key members of the Council's project team and with a representative of Mather & Co., who are handling the interpretation brief for the building. Similar consultations will continue over the next few months.

I should also report on the progress that we are making with our proposed constitution, the draft of our new Charitable Incorporated Organisation having been approved by those attending our Winter AGM in November. It was then subject to a legal opinion from Gabbs before we finally submitted it last month to the Charity Commission. I am pleased to report that the Commission have agreed that the proposed constitution met the criteria for charitable status with only relatively minor adjustments. We are proceeding on that basis, await their final decision and will communicate timescales once that is possible.

Throughout the past months, I have been conscious of the support given me by our committee members, many of whom have had a much longer connection with the Club than mine. Not the least of these have been the Vice-Presidents and the three senior (in terms of workload) office-holders: Jane Adams, Terry Morgan and Jonathan Comber. I am now more aware of the immense time that they put into the Club. The fruits are not only to be seen in the obvious manifestations of their work - the organisation of meetings; the editing of the Transactions (and what a fine 71st volume it is!); and the production of accounts and revision of financial processes - but also of their labours behind the scenes, which I am now better able to appreciate. This also, of course, applies to others, not least to Anne Harbour and Sue Olver, who organise our winter lecture programmes and the summer field trips respectively, and to Toby Cusworth, our membership secretary. Thank you all, both named and unnamed.

Finally, as I look towards my second year in office, I should also record my gratitude to Professor Keith Ray, who has agreed to succeed me as president from March 2026. Given his strong associations with the Club and his many other academic responsibilities, his willingness to put his name forward as a candidate for this office was greeted with acclaim at a recent trustees' meeting. There is no-one more fitting to be our president in the Club's 175th anniversary year. I look forward to working with Keith over the coming year to ensure as smooth a handover as possible. Meanwhile, in the more immediate future, as the days lengthen and we approach the spring equinox, we can all anticipate what I trust will be a glorious Woolhope summer.

Howard Tomlinson

SPRING ANNUAL MEETING

The Spring Annual Meeting took place in the Town Hall at 2.15 pm on Saturday 15 March 2025.

Officers and Committee

The meeting approved officers and committee members to serve for 2025-26 as follows:

*President: H. Tomlinson

*Vice Presidents: R. Jenkins, D. Whitehead, J.C. Eisel, J. Cooper

Elected Committee Members and Officers:

To retire 2026: M. Jenkins, C. Montez, W. Watson

To retire 2027: A. Harbour, D. James, M. Percival, J. Goldsmith

To retire 2028: D. Lovelace, K. Ray, T. Cusworth

*Hon. Secretary

J. Adams

*Hon Treasurer

J. Comber

*Hon Editor

T. Morgan

*Hon. Field Secretary

S. Olver

Hon. Membership Secretary

T. Cusworth

Hon Librarian

M. Percival

Those marked * are ex officio members of the committee.

Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) Application

At the meeting, it was confirmed that the officers and committee members for the year 2025/26 have agreed to act as the first trustees of the proposed CIO. The President updated the meeting on progress in our application; as noted in his report above, the Charity Commission were considering the application

STOP PRESS: On 20 March, shortly before this newsletter went to the printer, the Commission confirmed that they had accepted the Club's application. This response is faster than anticipated: further communication will follow as next steps are clarified.

Membership and Subscriptions

At the meeting, it was announced that as at 31 December 2024 there were 634 members (620 at end 2023) and 25 institutional members. Subscriptions for 2025 became due on 1 January 2025 and are mostly paid by standing order. Members who have not paid will soon receive a reminder – please ignore this if you've paid very recently.

Treasurer's Report

The accounts for 2024 were approved at the meeting and are enclosed separately, with a Treasurer's report which includes an explanation of the revised accounting format that the Club has adopted. This helps present the different funds that the Club holds clearly and complies with recommended practice for charities. We will need to follow this as a CIO

OUR THANKS TO JACKIE JONSON

The recent retirement of Jackie Jonson's as librarian gives me an opportunity to express the Club's gratitude for her work for the Club over many years.

Jackie joined the Club in 1985 after she had retired from a senior post in the RAF and joined the Club committee in 1994. In 1995, she, together with the late Frank Pexton and Gwil Rees, formed a sub-committee to sort out the Club library, which was in a state of disarray. They set about doing a stocktake, chasing up books that were on loan (in some cases for years!), organising the shelves in a logical order, and setting up systems to catalogue the accessions of material for the library, a task that took some years.

This situation pertained until 2000 when, after the death of Frank Pexton, Jackie Jonson and Gwil Rees were listed in our *Transactions* as librarians for the Club. The work continued, and the library became extremely well organised, due in large part to Jackie's organisational ability. Her efforts, in partnership in more recent years with Marianne Percival, whose vital work is ongoing and who continues to represent the activities of the library on the Club committee, has enabled an extraordinary collection of books, periodicals, maps and documents to be preserved and developed, for the public benefit of researchers and people interested in Herefordshire. Once the Woolhope Room re-opens and the collections are returned from storage, the Club will seek to take forward once more the library and the services it offers. Jackie's achievement will have been fundamental in making that possible.

Jackie has retired, after 30 years of service to the Club. In recognition of her work, she was President for 2015-16 and remained on the committee until recent years. We wish her well in her retirement, marked by a lunch with officers and committee members, held at the Pilgrim's Rest on 13 March.

From a personal point of view, I have always appreciated discussions with Jackie when problems have arisen, and the Club has so often benefitted from her sensible (and forthright!) advice.

John Eisel

FRIDAY GEOLOGY LECTURES, MARCH 2024 TO JANUARY 2025

The Friday evening lectures once again featured high-quality speakers addressing a variety of topics, and the Club was again represented at the Festival of Geology, organised by the Geologists' Association in a new venue at the Geological Society, Burlington House, Piccadilly, on Saturday 2 November, where all the notable societies were gathered. Our stand showed the history of the Club as well as our recent work on the geology of the Hogsback Hills. The Club was helped by two of our members, Roz and Neil Raha, who were at The Teme Valley Geological Society stand opposite our stand, on the first floor, in the prestigious library of Burlington House.

Professor Ian Fairchild: Latest update and explanation of 'The Anthropocene' (8 March 2024).

Ian explained how the word 'Anthropocene' – meaning the period of human influence on the planet and its geology - had been popularised by a Nobel-Prize winning scientist, who had worked on the ozone layer and the climate impact of CFCs. He explained many methods to archive evidence of change found in peat bogs, lakes, stalagmites, ice cores, and coral reefs, where data could be monitored. Geologists had sought to identify a 'golden spike', a location where the dawn of the Anthropocene might be defined - e.g., on the lines of the Chinese location said to mark the Permian-Triassic boundary. Latest work on the Anthropocene had not been universally accepted and was politically sensitive. Start dates of 1951 or 1952 were suggested.

Professor Jon Clatworthy: Professor Lapworth, his life and geology (27 September 2024).

Jon explained how this famous geologist, who came from humble beginnings, identified and defined the Ordovician period, between the Cambrian (541.0 to 485.4 Ma) and Silurian (443.8 to 419.2 Ma) periods. His use of graptolites in geological sequences was important. In Scotland his mapping near Durness solved the 'Highlands Controversy', when older Cambrian rocks were found to be lying above younger, Carboniferous rocks. Horne and Peach agreed his results and his use of a species of trilobite to support them. Despite bouts of depression, Lapworth carried on as a teacher until he retired in 1913. He supported women in their research and took many field excursions and lectures to societies and clubs. He died in March 1920, leaving his wife Janet and three surviving children: Arthur, a renowned chemist; Herbert, a civil engineer, geologist, and palaeontologist; and Edith Matilda.

James Cresswell: A geological journey through Iceland (18 October 2024).

James took us on a journey taking in the geological structure of various

formations, an exciting journey which is still happening today. To this end, he illustrated plate movements, the active, ongoing faults and the interesting volcanic eruptions throughout Iceland's history. He showed in detail geysers, massive waterfalls, and examples of Iceland's well-known thermal power.

Mark Baggott: Palaeontology and the school fossil project (17 January 2025).

Mark and his wife Lucy showed specimens and reviewed visits to quarries in Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, Powys, and Oxfordshire as well as beach locations at Aust, Garden Cliff, and Whitby. A video showed *Kosmoceras* ammonites from Coln Gravel. Sites explored ranged from Ordovician through to Quaternary. The second part of the talk dealt with the School Fossil Project run by the EHT, whereby various common fossils found in Britain are sent in a box to educational establishments across the UK, along with laminated resources for teachers. The cost of a box to the schools is met by sponsorship, donations and grants, or direct purchase by the school. Schools that cannot afford a box or find a sponsor can request a free box. Over 111 boxes have been sent so far. The project website address is <https://earthheritagetrust.org/fossils>

Stuart Cuming: The geology, hydrology and ecology of our rivers (21 February 2025).

Stuart, an experienced geomorphologist for the Environment Agency, spoke about factors which influenced the course of rivers and water volumes, and discussed climate-change effects, causes of pollution, and the consequences of all these things for wildlife, the environment, agriculture, and flooding. He showed that effective improvements could be enacted; his illustrations of natural management of river courses, to the benefit of wildlife and people alike, were striking. He showed too the need for care in engineered schemes to control rivers, to avoid the risk of adverse and unexpected impact on flows, habitats, and flooding. Lively questions took in topics of local and wider interest, with a focus on wildlife and agricultural practice, including the prospects and potential environmental benefits for meat grown in a laboratory.

WINTER MEETING PROGRAMME 2024-25

David Whitehead: Lady Brilliana Harley, a Puritan heroine (14 September 2024).

The speaker felt that Lady Brilliana Harley had been neglected by the Woolhope Club, notwithstanding a modern biography by Jacqueline Eales (1990), her letters published in 1853 and frequent references in modern works on the Civil War, which remains popular in British universities. As a woman neglected by her menfolk, she has particular interest. Using her letters, mainly written to her

son at Oxford, the speaker explored her Puritan leanings and association with several radical Puritan preachers. Since her husband, Robert, was domiciled in London and was Master of the Mint, she was very well informed on political developments in the years leading to the Civil War, i.e. 1640-42. Her religion set her aside from the majority of the Herefordshire gentry, and her letters demonstrated her isolation. She died of a 'greate coold' in October 1643 with her castle under siege from the local royalists

F. C. Morgan Lecture. Prof. Julian Thomas: Arthur's Stone revisited (12 October 2024).

In a beautifully illustrated talk of leading-edge archaeology, Prof. Thomas put Arthur's Stone into context. Excavations on Dorstone Hill had revealed a long-standing Neolithic complex with buildings (39th to 38th century BC), long mounds (C38 BC) covering their burnt remains, and a causewayed enclosure (C 37 BC). Conjectural chronology for Arthur's Stone, based on dating evidence and comparison with the monuments of Dorstone Hill and the Black Mountains, suggested a turf monument with timber avenue (C39 BC), a dolmen chamber and stone ring (C38-37 BC), a long cairn (C36-35 BC), and a stone avenue (C34 BC onwards). Finds illustrated the funerary role of the long cairn and connections with other parts of Britain. In 2024, the same team had found the first proven stone circle in Herefordshire, in the same field as the timber avenue that was replaced by a stone one, less than 50m south-west of Arthur's Stone.

Peter Hammond: The river sewage pollution scandal (9 November 2024).

Prof. Peter Hammond's talk dealt with how he has used Environment Information Regulation requests to gain access to industry records from the Environment Agency and Thames Water and has used the data to show the extent of sewage entering our river systems. He also showed slides demonstrating the huge impact of these sewage spills on wildlife and the environment. The data were sobering. His talk added a different dimension to the growing range of papers and lectures which have addressed key environmental matters for the Woolhope Club in recent times. An administrative slip means that the usual report on his talk is unavailable; we hope to correct this and properly represent the points he made in the 2024 *Transactions*.

Prof. David Siveter, Leicester Univ.: Exceptionally preserved Cambrian fossils of the Chengjiang lagerstätte, China (30 November 2024).

Following his talk about the Herefordshire lagerstätte (Silurian) in 2022, Prof. Siveter reviewed, with remarkable illustrations, the very different lagerstätte in Chengjiang, recording the explosion of life in the early Cambrian period. The fossilised remains were the earliest of a complex marine community. Some 250 species and 16 phyla, including invertebrates, provided direct evidence of the

roots of animal diversity. The significance to evolutionary studies was huge, both in the scale of palaeobiological information and the affinities of major groups - the audience was gripped by the implications. Prof. Siveter noted too that the area of the finds had become a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the extremely effective way in which authorities there had grasped this and constructed a high-quality museum and visitor facilities.

Philip Hume: The Mortimers of Wigmore: lords of the Welsh Marches and (nearly) kings of England (4 January 2025).

This extensive talk took the story of the Mortimers from Normandy in the mid-11th century to Henry VIII, who carried forward the Mortimer blood into the royal family. In general, we learnt that the Mortimers benefitted from longevity, fruitful marriages and a good eye for opportunities. They often made the right decision at the turning points in English history - e.g., Roger Mortimer stood by the king at the battle of Evesham in 1265 and thus flourished in the reign of his son, Edward I. Fortuitously, they abandoned the foolish Edward II and, by engaging the interest of his wife, Queen Isabella, became rulers of the country. There was a brief set-back in the 14th century but a marriage to a royal princess put them in the royal family and, by backing the Yorkists during the Wars of the Roses and winning the battle of Mortimer's Cross in 1461, they secured the throne and made the transition to the Tudor dynasty via Elizabeth of York, who married Henry VII. Thus, Henry VIII was a Mortimer.

Dr Howard Tomlinson, President: The building of the free library and museum in Broad Street (25 January 2024).

The President repeated his conference address of 8 October since the planned speaker was unwell. He described the early Woolhope Club, its role in founding the library and museum, and James Rankin, the benefactor who made funding possible. In his retiring presidential address of 1870, Rankin had said much about the philosophy behind the scheme. With the help of fascinating illustrations, the President traced the appointment of F. R. Kempson (also responsible for Rankin's home, Bryngwyn Hall) as architect, how land was bought, builders found, the interior designed, and funding shortfalls handled. He described the Club's fundamental role in contributing collections and bringing about the hugely celebrated civic opening in 1874. Finally, he reviewed the carvings that made the Venetian Gothic frontage so special, and how the joint dedication to art and science was powerfully represented.

Judy Stevenson: Sutton Walls Revisited (15 February 2025)

Judy reviewed the hillfort's location, rampart, and entrances and revisited extraordinary insights from Dame Kathleen Kenyon's excavations of the 1950s, showing the location of Iron Age and Roman period huts and illustrating daily

life through finds, including a huge iron anvil. Kenyon had also dated stone buildings and finds to the Romano-British period. Today, the executed men she found in a burial pit were thought to have died in early medieval times: perhaps the entourage of Ethelbert, said to have been slain by Offa at his royal estate hereabouts, or a Viking raiding party. Judy went on to describe the energetic work of the Sutton Walls Conservation Group in protecting a monument under threat - 20th-century gravel extraction and industrial landfill had caused great damage - and in re-assessing the archaeology.

Lucinda Orr: Valuing the Herefordshire Hoard (15 March 2025).

Lucinda Orr is a barrister and member of the Treasure Valuation Committee - she has great expertise in coins and medieval jewellery and valued the Herefordshire hoard. After exploring the context in which Vikings deposited the hoard in 879 AD, the rarity and historical significance of the coins, and the nature and likely symbolism of the jewellery, Lucinda described how the finders had failed to declare the hoard in contravention of the Treasure Act of 1996. Much of it had not been recovered. The finders and some dealers had received substantial gaol terms. She concluded by outlining the valuation process for treasure in the UK and elsewhere and answering many questions from an audience that much appreciated the perspectives she had offered on the hoard and its value.

GRAHAM SPRACKLING

Members will be sorry to learn that Graham Sprackling has died. Graham was a long-term member of the Woolhope Club, joining in 1971. He was a committee member and contributed to the journal. His main work for the society was his contribution to the wonderful Herefordshire Field Name Survey, (along with Ruth Richardson, Mary Thomas, Clarence Attfield and others), which gave rise to a series of papers in the *Transactions* in the 1980s and 1990s. Maps continue to be available. The survey was a particularly important achievement for the Club; a framed plaque of achievement can be seen at HARC. He contributed to many other groups involved in developing our understanding of the county's history, including the Longtown Historical Society, the Ewyas Harold History and Archaeology Society, and the WEA. He was Chairman of the Parish Council for many years and of the local playing field committee, and much more... He worked for the County Library Service, retiring in 1992. The tales he had from his working life as a travelling librarian were used by the BBC as the basis of an afternoon radio play on Radio 4. Can anyone else in the Woolhope Club claim such a distinction? He was 92 and has died after a life dedicated to public service.

Bob Davies

ITEMS OF LOCAL INTEREST

Sutton Walls Conservation Group

Judy Stevenson, who spoke to the Club so interestingly on 15 February, has asked us to make members aware of the work of the Sutton Walls Conservation Group (SWG). The Group's activity is described on the website at <https://www.suttonwalls.co.uk>, and the nature of this 'at risk' site is outlined in the report on p.9 above. Since 2017, SWG's energetic activity has covered mapping, recording of flora and fauna, restoration, interpretation boards, management, and maintenance. The Group is now looking for new Trustees & committee members to bring fresh ideas and commitment in relevant skills and interests. If you are interested in joining their efforts, please send an email to suttonwallscg@gmail.com.

WOOLHOPE CLUB AT THE HEREFORDSHIRE HISTORIES FESTIVAL

The first Herefordshire Histories Festival will be taking place across the county from May 10-18. The Club is most supportive of this initiative and has thus organised a programme of five events in partnership with HARC as well as participation in the History Fair there; we very much appreciate the collaboration with Rhys Griffiths and his team. The Club is working too with Moccas PCC on a lively and varied event there, for which a poster is enclosed with this newsletter. The events comprise:

- 1 exhibition at HARC in the search room
- Stand and display at the History Fair at HARC
- 4 talks at HARC, where speakers include Duncan James, David Whitehead, David Lovelace, and Keith Ray
- The event at Moccas Church with several speakers and tea.

Details of the events and how to book in advance (necessary for talks, but not exhibitions, at HARC, and for the Moccas event) are given on the back page of this newsletter. Please come and support the events that interest you – the programme is a strong one!

In addition, details of these events, the full range being organised by other groups and societies during the festival week, and booking details for all those events can be found at <https://herefordshirehistories.org>

WOOLHOPE CLUB AT THE HEREFORDSHIRE HISTORIES FESTIVAL EVENTS AND BOOKING DETAILS, MAY 2025

May 10-17, HARC, 10am-4pm

- Exhibition: Explore the Woolhope Club's Transactions
In HARC searchroom, free entry, no booking required.

Saturday 10 May, HARC, 10am-4pm

- Stand and Display: Woolhope Club, Geology and Fossils of Herefordshire
Free entry to History Fair, no booking required.

Saturday 10 May, Moccas Church, 2-5pm

- Moccas PCC in collaboration with the Woolhope Club
- Discover Moccas: church, organ and water pipe – see poster sent with this newsletter
Several speakers, history, music, launch of an info point, dynamic programme, tea included
Free: booking essential via Rachel Jenkins on 07921 251234 (by text or voice call).

Tuesday 13 May, HARC, 2.30 pm

- Duncan James: John Abell, Herefordshire's 17th-century 'Architector' £5.00. Please send an email to Archives@herefordshire.gov.uk to book your place. You'll then receive confirmation and details of how to pay.

Thursday 15 May, HARC, 2pm

- David Whitehead, 'The Battle of Hereford 1055' £5.00. Please send an email to Archives@herefordshire.gov.uk to book your place. You'll then receive confirmation and details of how to pay.

Friday 16 May, HARC, 10.30am

- David Lovelace: 'Landscape and land use: using digital mapping for heritage and habitat management' £5.00. Please send an email to Archives@herefordshire.gov.uk to book your place. You'll then receive confirmation and details of how to pay.

Friday 16 May, HARC. 2pm

- Prof. Keith Ray, 'The archaeology of Herefordshire: a reappraisal' £5.00. Please send an email to Archives@herefordshire.gov.uk to book your place. You'll then receive confirmation and details of how to pay.