



THE WOOLHOPE NATURALISTS' FIELD CLUB

Registered Charity No. 1212600

NEWSLETTER NO. 51, AUTUMN 2025

FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Continuing the theme of a room with a view, the burnt Bartonsham Meadow, as seen from my Park Street study and after weeks with hardly any rain and much heat, looks like a barren landscape. But the parched yellow ground that I espy from my lofty perch gives a misleading impression of the Meadow's regeneration under the care of the Herefordshire Wildlife Trust.

One prominent example for me this morning (on 8 July, at the time of writing), as Heather and I made our regular perambulation on the accessible paths that now traverse these fields, is provided by the twenty fruit trees recently planted in the north-east corner, together with a further five aligned in a row from the Green Street entrance to the meadow. This new orchard comprises various local varieties of pear, plum, quince and apple. These will eventually provide nectar for pollinating insects and a haven for wildlife, as well as fruit for the local community. But what struck me most were the evocative names that are attached to the saplings. These seem redolent of a bygone age: Merton Pride and Hendre Huffcup for the pears; Golden Gage, Purple Pershore and other varieties of Victoria plums; Portugal quinces; and a host of apple varieties, including Ribston Pippin, Pitmaston Pineapple, Blenheim Orange, Howgate Wonder and Bloody Ploughman. The first three of these apples all appear in our *Pomona*; the other two are respectively a cooker from 1915 and a later Scottish variety. An orchard such as the tiny one at Bartonsham provides an illustration of what is happening throughout England. It has been estimated that there are around 3,000 of these community schemes, blossoming on green acres in this country. They are tiny beacons of hope in a world facing a host of environmental challenges ranging from climate change to biodiversity loss.

All this is relevant to the past as well as the future of the Woolhope Club, since its members and associates (not least Dr Hogg, and Dr Bull and his gifted, artistic daughter, Edith) were instrumental in producing an early catalogue of English fruit varieties. The original series of seven instalments, issued annually from 1878 to 1884, was then published as *The Herefordshire Pomona*, which has been termed a classic of late Victorian natural history. As to the future, the Club is going to celebrate the county's apple heritage, one of our many events that will be especially organised for our 175th anniversary. An exhibition will be mounted at, and in partnership with, the Cider Museum and its energetic director, to promote the work of the *Pomona*, commemorate Herefordshire's orchard heritage from the 17th century to modern times, and examine the state of current research in relation to heritage orchards.

Other things are being planned for this anniversary which, like the celebration of Herefordshire's pome fruits, will look forward as well as backwards. The general theme will be: 'Heritage and Future: celebrating the achievements and mapping the way forward for Herefordshire's scientific and historical society'. It is premature to give further details now, but one proposed expedition is worth mentioning. We hope to organise a field trip to the Woolhope Dome. Not only do we derive our name from the Dome, but the area today is also of considerable importance to our future. To quote from a recent Wildlife Trust document: 'The Dome today captures the essence of the Herefordshire landscape. [It is] ... a fascinating geological area made up of concentric rings of alternate limestones and shales. The variety of aspects, slopes and soils here has created a unique combination of important habitats ... and [is] one of the last places in the country where all these habitats can still be found together. ... It is believed to be home to over half the species found anywhere in the UK.'

We are also looking forward to the opening of the new Broad Street Museum and Art Gallery, which may even coincide with the 175th anniversary celebrations. Whether that happens within the next two years or not, a sub-committee has had further discussions with representatives from the Council's project team and Mather & Co (who hold the interpretation brief) about the Woolhope Room. Good progress is being made as to its refurbishment and future design. These conversations will be progressed over the coming months.

More immediately, and sooner than I expected since the Charity Commission responded so quickly to our final submission, as from 19 March the Club has been designated a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). At the moment, as we finalise essential policies relevant to our new charitable status, we are continuing to operate as an unincorporated charitable organisation. However, I hope that by the time I write my final presidential newsletter next Spring, I will be able to report that the transition to the new constitution has been satisfactorily completed. The Club is indebted to members of the transition team, not least our treasurer and secretary, for guiding us through a complicated process which is well on the way to finalisation.

There are other connected and equally important technical developments that are essential to our future. Thanks to our membership secretary, who has worked tirelessly in establishing the system, we are now able to cater for online membership. The first three new members have signed up in this way (taking our total membership to around 660), and we are signing up to a membership software package that will further improve our offering to present and future members. And our editor, in addition to his editorial responsibilities, is leading the communications team in a thorough overhaul of the website. We anticipate that the site will be running in its new form by late 2025. Like many others, I continue to enjoy our varied field trips which have, as usual, been expertly organised by our field secretary. Not the least enjoyable visits for me were

Duncan James' fascinating exploration of Presteigne's historical buildings and Professor Nigel Saul's tour of Hereford Cathedral's medieval monuments. I have known this great building for nearly forty years, but Nigel explained things about its tombs and brasses which (to my shame) I had never considered. We are fortunate indeed to be able to attract such knowledgeable and friendly guides to lead us in our expeditions.

As I write, we are halfway through our summer programme. From 13 September, we start our Saturday lectures in the Town Hall which, for 2025-26, deal with topics as diverse as Ice Age ponds, ancient woodlands, Hereford's medieval Jewish and border-Baptist communities, new prehistoric archaeology, and G. F. Bodley's associations with Herefordshire. On Friday evenings, a strong set of geology talks has been arranged, also with some outstanding speakers, as will be apparent from the programme card.

It is, I believe, true to say that no other similar society offers such extraordinary value for money. Our annual subscription rates have remained at £13/15 for single/joint membership for many years, and the trustees feel that the time is right to increase the annual rates to £20/£25. I hope that the membership will feel that this remains a reasonable fee. Members are the foundation of our Club, providing, through subscriptions, the main income which enables the Club to operate and to fulfil its charitable purpose. The membership secretary will write to all members to outline the details and will be pleased to help with questions.

Finally, may I extend my sincere thanks to our office holders, other trustees, and all our members who, as we approach important landmarks in our long history, continue to support the Woolhope Club in so many ways.

Howard Tomlinson

MESSAGE FROM THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

Your Club is thriving, growing all the time, and busy promoting research about Herefordshire and making knowledge publicly available. Now it is getting ready for the last quarter of its second century!

As the President said in his message, members are the Club's foundation. Your subscriptions, due annually on or about 15 January, represent the main income which enables the Club to operate. To ensure that the Club continues to do so on a stable financial footing, the trustees have agreed to increase the subscription, beginning in 2026, from £13 and £15 for single and joint members to £20 and £25. This comes after many years with no change, despite inflation. I do hope that members will feel that this step is sensible and will support it.

I will write to all members in the coming weeks to set out the details and payment instructions that will apply to your subscription, due in January 2026.

For the small number who pay by cheque, please send me a cheque for the new amount in January. If you pay by standing order, we will ask you to cancel the existing order and set up a new one, payable to the CIO's bank account.

Recent months have seen your Club able to accept funds electronically and new membership software being tested. For those who have provided email addresses and authority to use them, you will receive reminders before the due date and a link giving the option to pay by credit card, debit card or ApplePay.

I'm here to guide members through the transition and you'll be hearing from me leading up to January! If you have and use email but have never shared the address with the Club, this would be a great time to do so. Please write to me with any questions or concerns:

By email at membership@woolhopeclub.org.uk

Or by post at: Membership Secretary, Middlewood Farm, Middlewood, Dorstone, Hereford. HR3 5SX

Toby Cusworth

OPPORTUNITIES TO CONTRIBUTE TO YOUR CLUB'S FUTURE

Our CIO is a membership organisation run by a committee or board of trustees. All are Club members. Together they devise and deliver the Club's extensive and diverse programmes. We know that members appreciate these; numbers attending talks and field trips are buoyant, the annual *Transactions* disseminates new research about our county, and our membership is rising.

This is an invitation to all members to consider coming forward to contribute your time and expertise to the running of your Club. In particular, we would benefit from additional skills and capacity in IT, communications, finance and administration, as well as members with expertise in natural sciences.

If you have some time to offer, we would love to hear from you. There are opportunities, working with a trustee or sub-committee, to contribute to communications, developing and delivering the talk and field-trip programmes, developing our website, producing publications and supporting the board.

For those interested in a more formal role, there are also some vacancies for Ordinary Trustees on the Trustee board. These roles are for three years with a possibility of re-election. We are looking too for a new Secretary for the Club; the Secretary is appointed for one year and is eligible for re-election.

The CIO constitution allows for 23 trustees. They should reflect the range of the Club's academic interests, a range of skills, an even gender distribution and a mix of ages. We believe that decision making will benefit from regular turnover

in the trustee cohort so that both experience and new ideas can be drawn on. As you can see from this newsletter, the Club's organisation and activities are moving forward. This is an exciting time to get involved!

Please contact Jane Adams, at secretary@woolhopeclub.org.uk, if you would like to find out more. We look forward to hearing from you.

HEREFORD HISTORIES FESTIVAL, 10-18 MAY 2025

Thank you to all who supported our events at the Hereford Histories Festival. The event at Moccas Church was a great success. Tickets sold out fast, and all enjoyed the varied programme. Thanks to Rachel Jenkins for arranging this.



Figure 1 (left). Mark Baggot showing fossil boxes. Figure 2 (above). Browsing the Club's *Transactions* exhibition

Over two hundred people attended our events at HARC. Together, these showcased many of the Club's areas of interest including rocks and fossils, archaeology, buildings and history. Our exhibition promoted the *Transactions* as an unrivalled research resource for Herefordshire. Special thanks go to Mark Baggot and Sue Hay of the Herefordshire & Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust, who brought along rock and fossil samples to the open day on Saturday 10 May. Among Mark's exhibits were examples of 'fossil boxes', developed for use by primary schools. For more information, or if you would like to sponsor a box for schools, please see www.earthheritagetrust.org/fossils/.

Talks by Duncan James, David Whitehead and Keith Ray were very well attended. All week, visitors enjoyed browsing the exhibition and the full set of

printed *Transactions* available in the open access library at HARC. In 2026, the Herefordshire Histories Festival will run for two weeks, from 9-25 May.

G. W. SMITH FUND

The Smith Fund was set up using a legacy from the late Geoffrey Walter Smith, who, while not a member, evidently appreciated the objects of our Club and how it carries them out. Rules were drawn up, the first grant from the Fund was made in 2003 and, up to the present, we have made 28 offers of grants. The guiding principle has been that we help to bring information into the public domain, usually by subsidising publications, but occasionally with projects such as digitising our *Transactions* from 1901 onwards: earlier volumes had already been digitised. All but the most recent volumes are readily available to the public on our website, and feedback indicates that this facility is well used. We consider this was £6k well spent!

We received fewer applications recently, possibly as a result of lockdown, but last year we made two grants, one towards new signs at the Blackfriars site in Hereford, and the second for the VCH volume on Cradley; we have long supported the VCH in Herefordshire. Both projects have been successfully completed, and the new signs can be admired at Blackfriars!.

We are now considering how we can widen the criteria for grants from the fund. However these are amended, a prime consideration is that the grant brings public benefit and information into the public domain. The conclusions of a sub-committee discussion in June will be reported back to the Club Committee in August. Any decisions reached will be communicated to members in the Spring Newsletter but, in the interim, if you are considering applying for a grant from the Smith Fund, please get in touch with me on 01432 271141 or by email at jceisel@btinternet.com so that it can be discussed and advice given.

John Eisel

PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE

The Publications Committee mainly supports the Editor in preparing our annual *Transactions*. Proposed papers are considered for suitability and a view taken, and advice may be given on how the paper can be improved. If a proposed paper is outside expertise available within the committee, help is sought from a member with relevant expertise. The main work of preparing papers for publication falls to our editor, and only those intimately involved in helping produce the *Transactions* can appreciate how much he does. We are also grateful for Suzy Craddock's work; she has an eagle eye and proof-reads final versions of all content. The volume of *Transactions* for 2024 is on track for publication by end 2025 and again will be a full and varied volume.

If any member has a proposal about a paper for publication, please get in touch with our editor to discuss it. We try to publish papers that represent the Club's wide interests. Our *Transactions* are highly thought of, and while writing a paper might be thought daunting, help and advice is always available.

While not strictly within the remit of the Publications Committee, the Club keeps in touch with members with our twice-yearly newsletter. The Club committee is looking for a newsletter editor, to collate and organise material to be published. This is an interesting job, and not too onerous, and keeps the editor in touch with what is happening in the Club. If you are interested, please contact our Club secretary, or me (01432 271141 or by email at jceisel@btinternet.com).

John Eisel

PROGRAMME OF WINTER MEETINGS

You'll find the programme card for the winter meetings included with this newsletter. The Saturday lectures will bring to our attention research of great interest to Herefordshire, covering topics from ecology and environmental conservation to historical insights and new archaeology. The Geology meetings, at 18.00 on Friday evenings, will once again feature high-quality speakers and will have much to offer, not only to the seasoned geologist but also to those who would like to know more.

Our thanks to Anne Harbour and Sue Olver for organising two such promising programmes. If any member has a suggestion for a lecture that might be suitable for the Club programme, please get in touch with a committee member.

HEREFORD MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY, BROAD STREET: UPDATE

Earlier this summer, Damian Etheraads updated us as follows:

'The Pre-Construction Services Agreement (PCSA) period is progressing well, with Vinci appointed as the main contractor and coordinating with the wider design team. Site works are on track to begin as planned. The Woolhope Room remains an integral part of the redevelopment. The interpretation plan for the room is progressing well. It is being developed through ongoing discussions with your subgroup, coordinated by Kate Riddington with the gallery designers. We are grateful to the subgroup for their constructive input and the wider club's help in answering questions from the curatorial team as they arise. The team will continue to liaise via this route as work progresses.'

The Club's subgroup has been working with Kate Riddington and Mather and Co. to develop the 'interpretation' for the Woolhope room. The intention is to preserve the look and feel of a 19th-century club room and library whilst delivering a modern library and meeting room. Panels will provide information on the room's historic features and the Club's history and current interests.

Alcoves above the fireplaces will be used as display cases, and discreet audio-visual equipment will be provided. We have requested a meeting with the architects to confirm plans for furnishings and refurbishment. We understand that these phases of work will be complete by summer 2026 and that the building will reopen during 2027. Just as this newsletter was going to press, we received a full, detailed update from Damian - we'll share this in a news email.

REPORTS OF FIELD MEETINGS 2025

Many thanks to Duncan James, Don Evans, Janet Cooper, Howard Tomlinson and Terry Morgan for their reports. Full versions will appear in the *Transactions*.

First Field Meeting: Historical Buildings of Presteigne, 25 April 2025

Although the Woolhope Club is of Herefordshire, it is important that county boundaries do not artificially restrict our reach, especially in respect of the border with Wales, with its historical impact on our county. Thus, Duncan James, our leader, invited us to take the small step across to Presteigne.

First on the tour was the Lloyds Bank building in Hereford Street, now up for sale. Built by and for Lloyds, the name is carved boldly in stone above the door. The building is a diminutive, single-storey version of a city bank with a miniature but lofty banking hall. Next was Whitehall (Fig. 3), a late medieval, timber-framed open hall. Although tree-ring dated to 1463, it hides its age behind a predominantly 18th-century facade. The site is close to the south end of Broad Street and No.1 High Street, once a freestanding building that may well have served as a booth hall, overseeing the market. Jetties on three sides are now underbuilt. We gathered beneath its dragon beam and massive joists that mark



out this early building, alongside a crosswing with attached pillars and underbuilt jetty, hidden by stucco. From there, after passing through the town's intimate Albert Square, we invaded a couple of shops further along the High Street to see ceiling beams that illustrate how many of the buildings, with charming Georgian and Victorian facades, hide far earlier structures that escaped Presteigne's great fire of 1681.

Figure 3. Whitehall

Mansion House (42 High Street) is enigmatic; a large, timber-framed, 16th-century building that has suffered many alterations. Nonetheless, we glimpsed the early building from a narrow alleyway, with remains of a gallery above, giving access to rooms within that might once have flanked a lost courtyard. On

the other side of the building, a heavily moulded ceiling beam was visible and the massive post that once supported the now underbuilt jetty.

We took lunch at the Radnorshire Arms (Fig.4), a handsome timber structure with a storeyed porch. Built as a private house in 1616 it became an inn in 1792. The landlord invited us inside to see the fine ceiling beams and panelling, and the meeting room on the first floor, where the results of 18th-century remodelling were evident.



Figure 4. The Radnorshire Arms

Later, the Church of St Andrew became accessible after a well-attended funeral. Presteigne's bell tower was once detached but the church expanded to embrace it, so it now doubles as an entrance porch. From the church, the group moved up Broad Street, taking in a zig-zag path behind buildings to emerge in Ave Maria Lane before crossing to Canon's Lane, a route that defines the former southern boundary of the church precinct. More buildings were discussed before the President's vote of thanks for a day of outstanding insight.

Second Field Meeting: Cwmyoy Expedition, 17 May 2025

Our leader, Alan Bowring, a Development Officer for the Fforest Fawr Geopark, has wide-ranging knowledge of the Brecon Beacons. He led us, via the old drovers' road, to Twyn-y-Gaer hillfort, sited on an outlier of the Brownstones of the Old Red Sandstone. At 427m, it provides views over the south-eastern quarter of the Black Mountains and several geological features: the fluvial, V-cross profile of the Grwyne Fawr valley and the glacial, U-cross profile of the Honddu valley; the mass movement features of Graig and Darren; the valley alignment along the Neath Disturbance, a fault line running from Vale of Neath; and the glacial derangement of a pre-existing, SSE-oriented drainage system.

Twyn-y-Gaer dates from the 4th / 5th century BCE, an elongated oval of 1.8 hectares, defined by a strong rampart with ditch and counterscarp bank, except on the south where the hillslopes are at their steepest. We entered via the inturned, east-facing entrance. Finds have included pottery and iron- and copper-alloy objects. Alas, time precluded a visit to the nearby 'Revenge Stone' where, in 1135, Richard de Clare was ambushed by Iorweth ap Owain and his men.

Lunch was taken at the 11th-century church of St Martin's, Cwmyoy, built on a landslip that is still moving. The tower leans at a greater angle than the Tower

of Pisa, and the church looks twisted. Victorian restoration added buttresses to the nave and chancel and flying buttresses to the tower. In the nave, the stone cross, of 11th to 12th century date, bears a rare carving of Christ on the cross. It would have stood in the churchyard to be venerated by pilgrims travelling through the Black Mountains, via Llanthony Abbey, to St Davids.



In the afternoon, the party viewed the south-eastern end of The Darren nearby, the backwall of a major slip, active since glacial action widened and deepened the Vale of Ewys. The main cliff is formed within the sandstones of the Senni Formation, resting on a base of the Freshwater West Formation, a succession of mudstones and sandstone with a notable calcrete development, the Ffynnon Limestone, at the junction with the Senni beds. At the Graig cleft, the landslip has split above and behind the church, giving the appearance of a yoke—hence the name Cwmyoy from the Welsh Cwm lau, 'Valley of the Yoke'.

Figure 5, Above Cwmyoy

Warm thanks were given to Alan, whose knowledge of the flora, history and legend of the area had made a principally geological day even more interesting.

Third Field Meeting: Medieval Monuments, Hereford Cathedral, 24 May

Professor Nigel Saul has known the cathedral since the 1960s. So, given his long association with the cathedral and Herefordshire churches in general - his latest book about them has recently been published by Logaston Press - the privileged few who signed up for the event were fortunate indeed to have such an erudite scholar lead our tour. His mastery of the national and local context of each monument, as well as detail, was memorable.

We learned that the medieval shrine of St Thomas Cantilupe (c.1287) is one of the most important in the country, second only to Thomas Becket's at Canterbury in recorded miracles, and that the fourteen soldiers surrounding it are the earliest known weeper figures. Surviving bishops' tombs are also significant, notably the alabaster tomb of the Carmelite (and Cornish) Bishop Stanbury (bishop of Hereford, 1453-74), a study in heraldry.

Prominent lay personages are also well represented in death, since the chapter had monopoly burial rights for prominent gentry and citizens who lived within five or so miles of the Close, and enjoyed their fees. The tomb of Joanna de Bohun of Kilpeck, Hereford's richest medieval widow, is the first known of an ordinary woman being commemorated in a Lady Chapel; and the tomb (again in alabaster) of Sir Richard Pembridge (d. 1375), with his feet on a long-haired greyhound, is the first surviving effigy of a garter knight. Not only the gentry were thus remembered; the tomb of Andrew Jones (d.1497) commemorates his restoration of the crypt from a charnel-house to a place of worship.



Figures 7 and 8. Professor Nigel Saul, explaining the monuments of Hereford Cathedral



The medieval brasses are particularly significant. Hereford is again fortunate to retain a larger and more varied collection than survives in most cathedrals. The Cantilupe brass is one of the earliest in England, though now separated from the shrine. Perhaps the finest is the canopied brass of Bishop Trellick (c.1360), which we discovered under a carpet on the choir floor, whilst that of Canon Richard de la Barr(e) (d.1386) is one of only ten 14th-century brasses of coped ecclesiastics surviving anywhere. The brasses of Richard Delamere, High Sheriff of Herefordshire, and his wife Elizabeth (with pet dogs), both wearing their Lancastrian 'SS' collars, are also important. Others of national significance include those of Archdeacon Rudhale (d.1476) and Dean Frowcester (d.1529). A Latin inscription relates to Richard Burgehyll, probably Headmaster of Hereford Cathedral School in the late 15th century.

Professor Saul held his audience spellbound for over two hours and gave freely of his extraordinary knowledge. The Club is indebted to him for his tour de force.

4th Field Meeting: Blackfriars, Coningsby Hospital and Museum, 21 June

A large party joined the President to visit the remains of the Blackfriars Dominican priory, a fine rose garden, the Coningsby Hospital and the St John Medieval Museum. The President explained that Dominicans had arrived in Hereford early in the 13th century and had built their priory on this site during the 14th. The monastery was shut down during the dissolution. He pointed out the remains of the west range, adapted into a house by Sir Thomas Coningsby.

Within the rose garden, the party viewed three new signs, erected with help from the Club's G. W. Smith Fund, that outline the history of the monastery; Coningsby's house or 'Commandery'; and the 14th-century preaching cross, the only one surviving on a friars' site. In 1864, George Gilbert Scott enclosed it with decorative stonework. The hospital's origins were explained. Philippa Fitzwilliam brought the damaged hospice of the Knights Hospitaller (dating from the early 13th century) and the priory ruins to Sir Thomas Coningsby as a dowry. He adapted them as a base and had the alms houses of the Coningsby Hospital built in c.1614, using stones from the ruined priory, to house ten servicemen, or servitors, a corporal and a chaplain, a model which influenced the later Chelsea Pensioners. The President shared new information about the original servitors. Today, renovated buildings provide accommodation for nine people. The party viewed one of the homes at the kind invitation of the resident.

In a wide-ranging presentation, Peter Harris, a trustee of Coningsby's Hospital, outlined the origins of the Knights Hospitaller of St John of Jerusalem in the First Crusade; the hospice run by Brother Gerard in Jerusalem from 1080, which treated people of all nations and religions; and the subsequent presence of the Knights in Malta and elsewhere. The cross of St John (used by today's St John's Ambulance) was closely related to the Maltese cross and the cross of Amalfi. During The Anarchy, a priory was founded at Clerkenwell as the headquarters in England of the Order of St John



Figures 9 & 10. In the courtyard of the Coningsby Hospital and time for tea!

Peter reviewed the career of Sir Thomas Coningsby and pointed out the family's arms and pew. He also explained the hospital's 17th-century operation, with reference to finance, food and clothing. All were fascinated by his description of the chapel's stained-glass and the content of the museum. In a shady corner of the garden, today's residents provided tea with spectacular cakes! Grateful thanks were given to them and to Peter Harris for a memorable afternoon.

Fifth Field Meeting: Snodhill Castle Excavations, 20 July 2025

Tim Hoverd initially led us to the eastern side of the castle where, surprisingly, no medieval or later material had been found in three new trenches. One had yielded Romano-British pottery and a house interior, marked by postholes; a second flints and a Bronze Age arrowhead; and the third Bronze Age pottery. The area had been occupied from c.2,000 BC to Romano-British times but its use thereafter was uncertain: ridging seen by LIDAR might indicate an orchard.

New steps eased access to the motte, the first part of the castle to be built, probably by William I's troops. Tim confirmed how the motte had soon been replaced by a stone keep, probably square, and how extra sides - seven or nine - had been added for stability. Even so one corner was starting to collapse.

We climbed down the steps to view the chapel, the rectangular structure with a surviving tufa altar, to the west of an apsidal building, now interpreted as a vestry or strongroom; the two aumbries it contained had been forced open, probably in the 1650s. The chapel had been made a royal free chapel, a royal peculiar exempt from the jurisdiction of the bishop and other church authorities, the only one of the forty-one such chapels not in a royal residence.

Across the bailey, we viewed the north tower, built in the early 15th century to strengthen the castle against Owen Glyndwr. It was first excavated in 2017/18; the removal of much rubble revealed a flight of steps and a cold room. Pottery of c.1400 was found. The massive walls, 3m thick, were paid for by the king.

At the site of the castle gatehouse, a huge structure of flat paving stones was part of a flight of steps, and a cobbled area at the top had survived; although of no value when the castle's stone was sold early in the 18th century, the cobbles had preserved the plan of one side of the gatehouse. A final trench had revealed how steep and impressive the rampart at the main entrance had been.

Finally, Tim Hoverd described the need for documentary research to broaden understanding of how the castle had been used and why it was finally demolished. The Snodhill Castle Preservation Trust had secured funding.

6th Field Meeting, Arthur's Stone Excavations, 23 July 2025

Demand meant that two separate parties from the Club were organised. Prof. Keith Ray, co-director of excavations with Prof. Julian Thomas, welcomed both.

He energetically showed that Arthur's Stone was part of a group of Neolithic monuments, not far from the complex previously excavated on Dorstone Hill.

Initially, he reviewed Herefordshire's first confirmed stone circle, part-excavated in 2024. Lively discussion took place about its function. Impressive new excavations had exposed more of the avenue leading to Arthur's Stone from the south (Fig 11); it had extended at least c.150 metres. It had been built first from wooden posts, later replaced with upright stones, a sequence so far unparalleled in Britain. In places, postholes and pits had been driven into bedrock, and some areas had been quarried. Machinery converting land to potato production in WW2 had destroyed any trace of stone above ground.



Figure 11. Post and stone holes



Figure 12. Trench near the capstone

Within the scheduled area, a trench (Fig. 12) showed that large stones had been robbed out at some point, although the monument had probably looked much the same since c.1700. More of the drystone wall previously recorded had been uncovered. Vertical slabs had been placed next to it, in one area covering breakage in the wall, caused by pressure from above. As with the capstone, which had broken on installation, it had not been repaired.

Prof. Ray explained how Arthur's Stone had been used for burials, with groups of wrapped bones (and sometimes cremated bone) inserted into chambers, accessed via a low corridor re-opened for this purpose. Eventually, the monument had been sealed off for burial, although it remained an important

memorial of the past. The capstone area had never been covered. He explained too the sequence of development across the site, from almost 6,000 years ago until late in the 4th millennium BC.

Finally, he noted the remarkable results of a drone survey of a field nearby. Traces of a Neolithic building, similar to those found at Dorstone Hill, might survive with other features, all within a large enclosure; he hoped that this might be the focus of investigation in 2026.

ITEMS OF LOCAL INTEREST

Herefordshire Wildlife Trust and the Woolhope Dome

Herefordshire Wildlife Trust, (HWT) have launched a nature recovery fund for the Woolhope Dome. In partnership with local communities, landowners and other organisations, work will build on conservation efforts and, with nature and wildlife in mind, support creation of connecting corridors, species-rich meadows, and management of woodland and orchards. To find out more or to donate, please see www.herefordshirewt.org/appeals/nature-recovery-fund

NEW - Cradley Publication & Victoria County History Update

Members will be pleased to hear that the Cradley history (ISBN, 978-1-908590-88-6, pp, 188, £15) was published in the VCH Shorts series on 29 May. This completes work on the rural parishes which will form part of a VCH volume on Ledbury and the Malvern Hills, the first 'Red Book' on Herefordshire since 1908. Completion of that volume is expected to take about two years, and funding is largely in place. At the same time, new work on north-west Herefordshire is planned in collaboration with local history societies and the Mortimer History Society. Discussion has begun with the Leintwardine History Society, and details of a joint research launch on 15 October will follow in a news email.

MEDIEVAL JEWISH HISTORY OF HEREFORD IN PARTNERSHIP WITH HEREFORD CATHEDRAL

We're delighted to be working in partnership with the Life and Learning programme of Hereford Cathedral on the Medieval Jewish History of Hereford. The Club looks forward to welcoming Debra Higgs Strickland, of Glasgow University, on Saturday 3 January 2026, to talk about: 'The 1290 expulsion and the place of Hereford's Jewish community on the Hereford Mappa Mundi'.

In the meantime, Life and Learning have organised an important lecture event, at College Hall in Hereford Cathedral, at 7.00 pm, on 17 September 2025. This is in memory of our former President, Joe Hillaby, whose contribution to Jewish history in Hereford and elsewhere was huge. Please see the poster overleaf. Tickets cost £10 and can be booked by phone on 01432 374 225, or online at www.herefordcathedral.org/events. We hope to see many members there!



LIFE & LEARNING

Opening windows onto life and faith for all people

THE MEDIEVAL JEWISH HISTORY OF HEREFORD

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE WOOLHOPE CLUB

Wednesday 17 September | 7 pm | College Hall

This lecture, in memory of Joe Hillaby, will commemorate the 750th anniversary of the movement of the expelled Jewish communities of Worcester and Gloucester who came to Hereford in 1275.

Dr Luke Devine from the University of Worcester will share the history of the Jewish community in Hereford and some of its individuals.

Dr Dean Irwin, visiting fellow at the University of Lincoln, will explore the records which allow us to access the Hereford Jewry building upon the work of Joe Hillaby.

Tickets cost £10 and can be purchased from the cathedral website or by calling 01432 374 225.

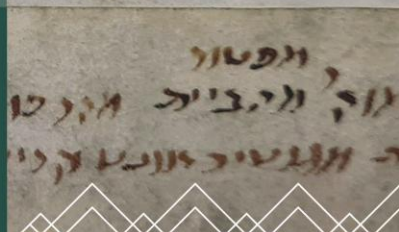
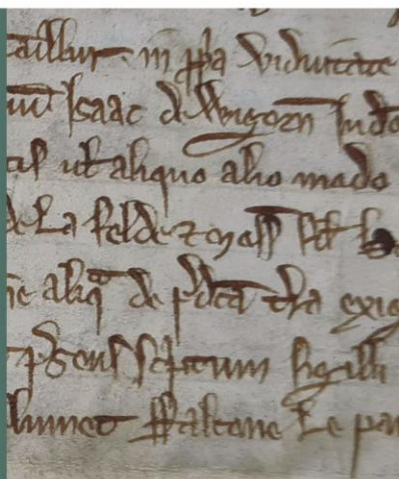
SAVE THE DATE

Saturday 3 January 2026, 2.15 pm

THE 1290 EXPULSION AND THE PLACE OF HEREFORD'S
JEWISH COMMUNITY ON THE HEREFORD MAPPA MUNDI

Woolhope Club Lecture by Debra Higgs Strickland
Hereford Town Hall

Free entry - booking not required



HEREFORD
CATHEDRAL

To book your tickets or find out more information please
visit www.herefordcathedral.org/events