



## WOOLHOPE NATURALISTS' FIELD CLUB

Registered Charity no. 521000

NEWSLETTER No. 46 SPRING 2023

### FROM THE RETIRING PRESIDENT

I have reached the end of a two year stint as President. Two years was not unique in the long history of the Club but it was unusual. Like most voluntary societies we have hit the generation gap. Whereas the older generation took retirement between 60 and 65, younger people are finding it more difficult to give up work completely. Moreover, their family lives are much fuller as children have come later and there are more and more attractive pastimes to engage in, rather than joining the Woolhope Club or a similar local society. Also, the tradition of running a programme of talks and visits is less attractive and increasingly quaint when everyone has a car and is only a short drive away from a multitude of other diversions. Covid, of course, did not help but since the Club did not engage in Zoom meetings and we were quick off the mark in restarting our public programme, we recovered our audience fairly quickly. Now we have a regular attendance of 40-60 people and are back to where we were in 2019.

The Assembly Room at the Town Hall is not ideal, but we are able to spread out. This, of course, increases the problem of audibility, which has been a difficulty; especially when speakers like to sit down or move away from the fixed microphone. We intend to do something about this, as we are unlikely to return to the Woolhope Room, in Broad Street until 2025, where there will be an integrated audio visual system. During the last twelve months, the officers of the Club have been engaged in intensive negotiations relating to the future use of the Club Room (Library) in Broad Street. Aply led by our Hon. Secretary, Jane Adams, we have persuaded the Council and its advisors, to take our needs seriously. Indeed, as more consultants visited the Room, the more it rose-up their agenda as the jewel in the crown of library/museum service in Hereford. In 2025 we should be able to seat 60-70 people with ease and a number of other innovations – some expensive – will make the club library function more safely and conveniently.

During the building work upon the Old Library the Woolhope Room will be sealed-up and inaccessible, with the books locked in their cabinets until the official opening of the new museum. I feel confident that the Club will continue to hold its prime position in Herefordshire, via its meetings and its *Transactions*, and remain an active repository of local archaeology, history and natural history. We will soon be preparing for our 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2051!

David Whitehead

### FROM THE NEW PRESIDENT

It's over a decade that I have been back in my beloved Herefordshire after half a century away, but it still never ceases to take my breath away ...the landscape, biodiversity, and heritage. I count myself very fortunate to have this additional time to enjoy it. Herefordshire is unique. However, it is nonetheless very apparent that much has been destroyed and lost since my childhood, and much more is at risk. The Woolhope Naturalists Field Club has an impressive record since its inception a century and a half ago, not only in documenting Herefordshire's heritage and biodiversity, but also in seeking to protect it.

I would like to pay great tribute to David Whitehead who has given yet more sterling leadership over the last two years as President, and who will thankfully continue to play a key role as we go forwards, as well as to the other members of the committee who give the Club enormous amounts of time, thought and expertise. In addition, the Club is very fortunate in its members, many of whom also have considerable expertise which we continue to draw on. We also need to encourage the next generation of keen enthusiasts to join us if the Club is to live on successfully into the rest of the century, facing and addressing the external threats that beset us, not least climate change, pollution and loss of biodiversity as well as ensuring the documentation and protection of our geological, archaeological and historic heritage. The Club membership annual fee is incredible value for money, including as it does the *Transactions*, and I am always surprised that more people do not join, although this may partly reflect everyone's busy lives.

Following the WNFC exhibition displayed in the Woolhope Room last summer to celebrate the River Wye and draw attention to the threat from pollution from sewage overflow, chicken slurry and excess fertiliser (the exhibition can still currently be seen at HARC, and will continue to circulate round the county over the next few months), I am planning my Presidential Visit this year to Weobley, where part of the day will be spent at a farm leading the way in reducing soil and watercourse pollution. The remainder of the day will be spent looking at Weobley Castle, with David Whitehead, and the village houses, with Duncan James.

Another issue that I hope we will be able to continue to move forwards in the next few months is the concern about oak and sweet chestnut decline in most of Herefordshire's deer parks. Forest Research will shortly be reporting their research findings on the acute oak decline in Moccas deer park, and several other sites round the country, at a conference in Shrewsbury, where David Lovelace will also be speaking.

Rachel Jenkins

## COMMITTEE AND OFFICERS 2023/24

Officers and Committee members were approved at the Winter Annual Meeting.

President	R. Jenkins
Vice presidents	D. Whitehead, J. C. Eisel, J. Cooper
Committee:	
To Retire 2024	A. Harbour, D. James, M. Percival
2025	D. Lovelace, K. Ray, H. Tomlinson
2026	M. Jenkins, C. Montez, W. Watson
Hon. Secretary	J.M. Adams
Hon. Treasurer	I.K. Porter
Hon. Librarians	J.R. Jonson, M. Percival
Hon. Editor	T. Morgan
Hon. Field Secretary	S. Olver
Hon. Programme Secretary	A. Harbour
Hon. Website Manager	Vacant

Three committee vacancies remain unfilled. If you are interested in finding out more about the work of the committee please contact Jane Adams, honorary secretary at [secretary@woolhopeclub.org.uk](mailto:secretary@woolhopeclub.org.uk)

## INTRODUCING OUR NEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS

**Christian Montez** is an Architect who runs a small practice in Herefordshire with a particular interest in the local vernacular. He sits on the Advocacy Committee for SPAB and his personal interests include the Hereford School of Romanesque, Building Recording, Experimental Archaeology and the Lime Revival.

**Will Watson** is an environmental consultant with over 30 years-experience in surveying habitats in the West Midlands. He currently specialises in freshwater ecology. Recent projects include Project Ecologist to the Ice Age Pond Project, supervising the restoration of Berrington Hall Pool for the National Trust and drawing up the 'irreplaceable habitats' pond definitions for DEFRA. He is Ecological Advisor to the River Lugg Internal drainage Board and, in a voluntary capacity, is working on guidelines for a project to restore the River Wye.

## IN MEMORIAM

We are saddened to report the deaths of two past presidents of the Club, Rosamund Skelton and Gwilym Rees. Full obituaries will be published in the 2022 *Transactions*.

## Rosamund Skelton

Rosamund Skelton's many friends were sad to hear of her death in January. Despite battling against cancer for many years she remained cheerful, her curiosity, energy for life and humour shining through.

Rosamund was born in Argentina, grew up in Yorkshire and read geography at UCL before her career in town and country planning, mainly in Herefordshire. Her interests included local history, archaeology, geology, rambling and canoeing. She devoted characteristic energy to them all, making a major contribution to the work of the Herefordshire & Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust and acting as president of the Hereford County Canoe Club. Rosamund was prolific as a local historian and contributor to archaeological activities, always committed to field research as well as writing for the Woolhope Club's *Transactions* and *Herefordshire Archaeological News*. Her investigations of deserted medieval villages were particularly important. Rosamund was president in 2000 and 2010.

## Gwilym Rees

In October members of the Club were sorry to hear of the death of Gwilym Rees. Coming from a local farming family, he had a distinguished career in the RAF, after which he retired to Leominster. He joined the Club in 1986 and was president in 1992-3.

In 1995 he, with Jacqueline Jonson, and help from the late Frank Pexton, set about putting the Club library into order. This had been neglected for many years and was in complete disarray with the room being used as a museum store. It took 5 years to organise the collection and produce a catalogue, making it into the first-rate research facility of which we can be proud. For 20 years Gwil came in every Thursday without fail to open the library to all comers and to firmly establish the Club's commitment to the community. We owe him a huge debt of gratitude.

## WINTER MEETINGS 2022-23

This winter's varied programme has brought a series of high-quality speakers to the Town Hall. Numbers attending have been recovering after Covid, reaching about 70 people for recent events. Each presentation is briefly summarised below; detailed reports will appear in the 2022 or 2023 *Transactions* as appropriate.

## The F. C. Morgan Lecture: Prof. David Siveter

Prof. Siveter's topic was 'The Herefordshire Lagerstätte: Soft-Bodied Virtual Fossils from a Silurian Volcanic Ash.' At a site in Herefordshire, fossils of

numerous marine invertebrates from the Silurian period are preserved, complete with their soft parts in extraordinary 3-D fidelity, with arthropods and sponges predominating. Such preservation is very rare. Prof. Siveter described how individual specimens are serially ground to remove extremely thin layers. With each grinding the specimens are then photographed, so that each can be virtually reconstructed from the combined images, a form of tomography. The resulting virtual fossils are making a major contribution to the study of the palaeobiology, history, ecology and evolution of the invertebrate groups represented. For the audience, it was astonishing to view such images from so distant a past.

### **David Lovelace: Veteran Trees**

David Lovelace gave a presentation on the history and current status of veteran trees in Herefordshire, illustrated using Geographic Information System (GIS) software to overlay historic maps and aerial photographs, so that they align accurately with each other. This enables changes over time to be analysed at a landscape scale as well for individual trees. As an example, the decline of ancient trees at Moccas Park was demonstrated by comparing high-resolution aerial photographs taken in 2021 with those from 2000. David proposed that a conference was needed to review the current status and future of veteran trees in the county's parkland.

### **Philip Hume: 'The King's Writ does not run here': The Welsh Marcher Lordships**

Philip Hume, author of *The Welsh Marcher Lordships: Central and North* (Logaston, 2021), described the 'regal powers' exercised by the marcher barons who colonised territory on the Welsh Border. Standing in the shoes of the king, they could build castles, raise armies and plunder at will, although soon the 'law of the march' managed the area, in many respects better than in England, regulating taxation, justice and trade. However, after King John lost Normandy, his heirs focused more on Wales. Its conquest by Edward I undermined the power of the marcher lordships and, once the Mortimers' lordship had passed to Richard, Duke of York, whose son Edward became King of England, their powers passed in the name of the king to the Council for the Marches of Wales.

### **Prof. Keith Ray: The Militarisation of Anglo-Saxon Hereford? Clues from Archaeology, Starting at Breinton**

Prof. Ray brought together long-established knowledge of Anglo-Saxon Herefordshire with evidence from recent archaeology at Breinton (*TWNFC* 2022, pp. 85-106), earlier work near Sutton Walls, and new understanding of Offa's Dyke. He raised fresh interpretation of written sources that indicated military activity in and around Herefordshire. The combined evidence suggested a

systematic approach to controlling a volatile frontier and protecting against Viking incursion. The discovery of the Herefordshire hoard, left by Vikings, raised another thought: might the bodies discovered at Sutton Walls in fact be Vikings, especially since groups of similar characteristics had been found elsewhere, rather than the entourage of King Ethelbert as previously suggested?

### **Joe Kerr: Alfred Watkins and the Woolhope Club**

Joe Kerr reviewed Watkins's successful business career, remarkable achievements as a photographic innovator (especially in light meters), his contribution to Hereford and his fine antiquarianism. However, his main topic was Watkins's espousal of ley lines, the fiercely opposing views they still generated, and the outright rejection Watkins encountered from archaeologists and the academic world. Even Watkins's friends in the Woolhope Club had been deeply sceptical, as shown by George Marshall's private papers at HARC. Whatever view people took, Joe Kerr demonstrated convincingly that Watkins had actually developed the ideas first set out in 1922 in *Early British Trackways* over many years, and not in a few months following a 'revelation' at Blackwardine.

### **Tim Hoverd: Snodhill—Herefordshire's Forgotten Castle**

Tim Hoverd energetically outlined progress since 2016 in understanding this unusual castle. Despite large-scale sale of stonework in the 1650s, wall lines, the north tower, a likely barbican, the frequent work to prevent collapse of the keep and other structures, and the nature of the chapel and vestry had all been investigated successfully. The initial motte and bailey would have supported Norman incursion into Wales and the north tower was built to respond to Owain Glyndwr's campaigns, but much about the castle, its extensive deer park and even a pleasance, suggested that the Chandos family had used it for pleasure and entertaining. The family was little understood, but the greatest mystery of all was that almost no documentary mention of Snodhill Castle had been discovered.

Terry Morgan

### **Geology Lectures**

Through the winter geologists – and those simply wanting to know more – have enjoyed lectures on a Friday evening from high-quality speakers. Geology was fundamental to the early days of the Club and now, as then, underpins the world immediately around us, its natural history and its history. Geologists and non-specialists alike found much of interest in this winter's programme. Details of the programme for 2023-24 are nearing completion and will be publicised in the autumn.

**Prof. David Siveter** gave this year's F. C. Morgan lecture. The leading-edge techniques and evolutionary evidence he described are reported in the account of the Club's Saturday meetings above. To the end of February, highlights of the

Friday lectures have included:

**Dr Cherry Lewis's** insights into James Parkinson (1755-1824), an apothecary, surgeon and activist who not only investigated 'shaking palsy', now known as Parkinson's disease, but also became internationally famous for his study of fossils.

**Prof. Tony Watts's** compelling review of tectonics, with special reference to how the impact of the loads imposed by ice sheets, and the subsequent effects of melting, erosion and rivers, has determined much about landscape evolution in the Cotswolds, the Malvern Hills and around the Wye Valley.

**James Creswell's** talk on the geology of Antarctica with outstanding photographs, a talk reflecting both geological knowledge and experience as director of tours to the area.

**Dr Tim Carter's** narrative of the geologists – Horner, Murchison, Phillips, Holl, Callaway and others – who developed so much thinking with reference to the Malvern Hills, and the energetic role of the Naturalists' Field Clubs in the 19th century.

Those who came to the Christmas Special (with mince pies) shared and discussed specimens of rocks and fossils and had another chance to view the DVD made by Woolhope members—'Picnic in Siluria'—with Prof. Hugh Torrens playing the role of Sir Roderick Murchison.

Sue Olver

## REDEVELOPMENT OF HEREFORD MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY

The ambitious redevelopment project for the transformation of Hereford Museum and Art Gallery has reached the end of the design phase. This marks a significant milestone. A bid for £5million was submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund on 23 February with a decision expected in June. This is the final tranche of the £18.5 million budget for the project. A planning application submitted earlier this month is in the early stages of review. Further information can be found at <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/news/article/1503/planning-submitted-to-redevelop-museum>.

The new building will deliver a substantial increase in exhibition space with three large permanent galleries, spaces for temporary exhibitions and special collections, education and events rooms, café and shop. Outline themes for two of the permanent galleries have a strong resonance with the Club's core interests in geology, natural history, ecology, archaeology, history, buildings and people. The design of the Woolhope Room will recognise these synergies as well as celebrating the Club's longstanding and ongoing enthusiasm for promoting research and disseminating new knowledge.

Over the last few months a sub group of the main committee has worked closely with Sarah Lee, Interim Museum lead, in the development of plans for the sympathetic upgrading of the Woolhope Room. These designs are sensitive to the heritage nature of the room whilst addressing long-standing issues of ventilation, lighting, access to the library shelves and audio-visual facilities. The improvements planned will significantly enhance the Club's facilities for provision of our research library and programme of activities. The Woolhope Room will once again be a prestigious space to be made use of and enjoyed by the Club. It will also be available for other groups to use for suitable events such as talks and seminars.

The detailed development of the galleries will take place between June 2023 and 2024. The Club will continue to be actively involved as the project moves into this delivery phase and will work closely with Damian Etheraads, the newly-appointed Museum and Art Gallery lead.

The Broad Street building is expected to close in May 2023 with construction to start on site in November. The new facility is expected to reopen in Summer 2025.

Jane Adams

## EDITOR'S UPDATE

The 2022 *Transactions* are scheduled for publication between late September and the end of October. Papers with archaeological, geological and botanical content will complement a strong range of historical material and recorders' reports. This year more good-quality proposals have been submitted than we can publish in a single year, so that a promising base is coming together for the 2023 volume too.

Although details remain to be finalised, we're likely to support a paper in the 2022 *Transactions* with substantial research and reference material, published online only, a fresh way to help contributors and to demonstrate the Club's commitment to making information available to researchers. Our strong website makes it possible to hold extensive data there, whilst papers as published in the *Transactions* retain a format suitable for readers.

Terry Morgan

## GW SMITH FUND

Currently there are no outstanding applications from members for a grant from the Smith fund. It seems that things are slow to pick up to pre-Covid levels, but if any member has a suitable project which we could help towards publication, please get in touch with me to discuss the proposal. Tel. 01432 271141 or email [jceisel@btinternet.com](mailto:jceisel@btinternet.com)

John Eisel

## WOOLHOPE CLUB LIBRARY

The library has recently been given quite a sizeable donation of books, which we are busy adding to stock, hoping to be able to get it finished before the library closes, probably at the beginning of May, when the transformation of the building should begin. We are also trying to ensure that everything is as up to date as possible before the closure. It makes a change to be able to prepare this time. When the library was forced to close for asbestos, flood and Covid we simply walked out through the door and were unable to return.

We look forward to seeing you again when the library reopens.

Jackie Jonson and Marianne Percival

## PUBLICATIONS OF LOCAL INTEREST

Recent publications include the following.

**Horse-Drawn Tramways of the Wye Valley**, by Heather Hurley, 176 pp. (Logaston Press 2022), ISBN 9781910839607, £12.99.

This book identifies the routes of the known horse-drawn tramways of the Wye Valley and the surrounding area, including Brecon, Abergavenny, Monmouth, the Forest of Dean and Kington. It explores who built them and how they were operated. The tramways were in use from the late 18th century until the introduction of steam-driven railways. The book is attractively illustrated and published by Logaston in its usual appealing format.

**Offa's Dyke Journal Volume 4 for 2022, Borders in Early Medieval Britain**, edited by Ben Guy, Howard Williams and Liam Delaney. Published online by JAS Arqueologia. To download the PDF free of charge, insert [Vol 4 \(2022\) \(jasarqueologia.es\)](https://www.jasarqueologia.es) into a browser to find the required link. Printed version: 176 pp. (Archaeopress in association with JAS Arqueologia 2022), ISBN 978-1-80327-396-9. About £35 from online booksellers.

The Journal publishes peer-reviewed research on the archaeology, history and heritage of frontiers and borderlands focusing on the Anglo-Welsh border. In volume 4, papers relevant to Herefordshire and surrounding counties include Prof. Keith Ray's, about the borderland in the mid to late Anglo-Saxon period; and those about place names in relation to Offa's Dyke and the changing approach to Wales taken by English kings.

**The First Stones, Penywrylod, Gwernvale and the Black Mountains, Neolithic Long Cairns of South-East Wales**, edited by William Britnell and

Alasdair Whittle, 302 pp. (Oxbow Books 2022), ISBN 978-1-78925-739-7). About £38.

Contributions in this substantial archaeological book bring together the results of excavations and detailed analysis of finds, with discussion of the implications and excellent illustrations. The relationships between the Neolithic sites investigated, and those at Dorstone Hill and Arthur's Stone, are significant. The review of the book in the 2022 *Transactions* will explore themes arising.

## HIDDEN HEREFORDSHIRE: A DYNAMIC INITIATIVE FOR THE COUNTY'S NATURAL WORLD

The 'Hidden Herefordshire' project, based at the Herefordshire Biological Recording Centre (HBRC) at HARC in Rotherwas, will interest members wishing to know more about the natural world of the county and to help conserve it. Since receipt of a Heritage Lottery Fund grant in 2021 (with Cultivating Learning and Nature CIC) a new website and a very active range of public workshops and educational activities have been launched. These complement the HBRC's work in recording the county's species. For example, Ian Draycott, who wrote about Bryophytes in our 2021 *Transactions*, has been running events on both Bryophytes and *Diptera* – flies – in the county. Information and opportunities to participate can be found at <https://hbrc.co.uk>

## MEMBERSHIP & FINANCE

### Membership

As at 31st December 2022 we had a total of 601 members an increase of 10 compared to the previous year together with 26 Institutional members a drop of 1. There were 49 new members during the year, 29 had resigned or deceased and 10 memberships lapsed due to the non payment of the subscription.

### Finance

Accounts for the year to 31st December 2022 are attached on a separate sheet.

The accounts for the year to 31st December 2022 show a deficit in the overall funds of £6016.57 due to a number of one off expenditure items.

The Library account saw expenditure of £3302 on doors for the cupboards and £558 on the purchase of a laptop.

The general fund saw expenditure of £642 on display banners and there was an increase in the cost of the *Transactions* and on postage. Ian Porter