

Isle of Wight Record Office: Article for IWFHS Magazine

Since I last wrote in July we have seen a change in the public face of the Record Office. We were very sorry to say goodbye to Joanna Stuiver, who made an outstanding contribution in the year that she spent with us, before she had an opportunity to move into the world of university admissions in London. We have however been exceedingly fortunate to find a replacement, Linda Scurr, who has considerable experience and local knowledge, from her work at Newport Reference Library and then in her role at the Isle of Wight College. We hope that she will enjoy her career with us. She is already starting to work on expanding our outreach, helping us to reach more people across the Island and beyond. These events include a monthly session in a library through the winter and spring, and the development of new talks geared towards groups who we have not spoken to previously. As a result in the first half of the coming year I will be talking to a number of Horticultural Societies about Island gardeners and gardening. For the last few years we have put on a garden history workshop for the Isle of Wight Gardens Trust, visiting places like North Court, Farringford, Hasely and most recently Westover. These talks however will be about the gardens of smaller houses and cottages, considering who took on the work, and trying to find out whether we can learn more about historic plantings of flowers and the introduction of new species. Meanwhile the digitisation and conservation of the 18th century Appuldurcombe estate map have been completed. With the help of the Isle of Wight Gardens Trust a grant has been received from the Down to the Coast project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

This past autumn we have been doing a good deal of work with the Northwood Cemetery Heritage Project. We have delivered a total of eight workshops on three themes: house history, cemetery and churchyard history, and an examination of the special challenges when researching the histories of women when many sources like obituaries are less than generous in the amount of information that they give.

On a couple of occasions we have taken the opportunity to take documents out into the community. During Cowes Week we joined up with our colleagues at the Cowes Maritime Museum to display some documents that related to the history of yachting on the Island. Due to the glorious weather this was very poorly attended. We will learn lessons from that for next year. By contrast when we went to a free entry day at the Museum of Island History in December to show some of the papers relating to J Samuel White's there were well over a hundred visitors. On display were general arrangement plans for the Polish destroyers and it is hoped that these will also be on show for one of the days set aside to mark the 75th anniversary of the Cowes Blitz in May. The plans are amazingly detailed showing the separate areas where the officers' and the crew's potatoes are to be stored. Many volunteers have been working very hard for us and their fellow researchers over the course of the past 12 months. In my last piece I wrote of the work of those transcribing the Ogländer and Upward diaries. In addition to this there is the amazing dedication of the Society's own volunteers who are working on the records of the House of Industry and are continuing to make steady progress. Other work is being carried out on marriages between 1754 and 1837, and on a register of Parkhurst Prison which begins in January 1912. In the following year more than 360 entries appear. These vary from Daniel Mason, found guilty of arson at the Worcester Quarter Sessions to the entry relating to a Henry Tudor who was admitted to Parkhurst in January 1913 having been sentenced in Brecon for breaking and entering a dwelling house and stealing property.

2016 was seen by many as being remarkable for the number of notable individuals who died during the course of the year. Sadly this was also true for losses to the local history community on the Island. Bernard Taylor was a very knowledgeable courteous and generous local historian for Cowes, who was always a delight to see in the Record Office. A former craftsman at Benzies, the jewellers, he was a great collector and the Record Office was among the organisations that benefitted from his generosity. Large numbers of papers and photographs were bequeathed to the office and we are still producing a list of these. Patrick Nott, who died in December, was a lecturer at the Isle of Wight College but best known for his championship of the seismologist, John Milne, and of industrial archaeology more generally. He organised a remarkable visit to the House of Parliament where options included visiting not only the parliamentary chambers and the rooms of state, but also what was happening behind the scenes. This included a visit inside the clock tower to see the real Big Ben, and most remarkable of all a visit to the basement to see all the utilities, the ventilation shafts, sewerage systems, pipes and electrics. It was one of the most unusual and enjoyable trips that I have been on, if very far from the most glamorous. Patrick also wrote a history of Quakerism on the Island, and ensured that prior to his death his very interesting work on hymn-writers of the Isle of Wight was complete on the internet. <http://www.iwhistoryextras.org/hymnwriters/hTalk.pdf> In addition to this he spent a good deal of his time researching back copies of the Hampshire Telegraph from 1809 – 1850 to find all known adverts and reports relating to Island schools and other educational organisations. These are available at the Record Office.

We continue to receive a range of new accessions. As well as the papers from Bernard Taylor (2016/40), we have received an interesting range of smaller accessions. These include:

2016/37 Plans of Ryde Pier Pavilion, 1894

2016/43 Souvenir Programme for Drake's Vertical Retort installation at Newport Gas Works, c1936

2016/44 Ryde All Saints: vestry minute book, 1866-1970

2016/66 Dissertation by Jane Smith on Ashley Sea Mark, 1735-1835

2016/68 Patent by Captain Cowper Phipps Coles of Ventnor for improvements in construction of vessels of war, forts, and other defences, 1866

2016/70 Minutes and other papers of Isle of Wight Methodist Circuit:, 1889-2009. Includes records of East Wight Circuit, and of chapels at Bembridge, Chillerton, Nettlestone, Ryde, Sandford, Shanklin, Totland, Ventnor, Wroxall, and Yarmouth. Only pre-1930 items are for Chillerton (from 1924) and for Yarmouth (from 1899).

2016/72 Gardening diaries of Grace Claudia Walker of Seaview, 1957-94

Finally six marriage registers have been deposited with us in the past year. These are for Cowes St Mary's (2012-13), Cowes St Faith's (1986-2010), Gurnard Methodists (1987-2006), Ryde All Saints (1967-79), Ryde St John's (2011-16), and Shorwell, 2012-16.