



# Roath Local History Society

*Bringing History to Your Doorstep - since 1978*



June 2021

**Dear R.L.H.S. Members,**

We have an uplifting finale to our popular series of Lockdown Zoom Talks:

 **Thursday, 10th. June @ 19.00** 

 **The World Whistled their Melodies**   
*presented by* **Griff**  **Harries**



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pwd=Z0RrdkZXQm4xRGE3Q2cvbEFLcUxqdz09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88316817664?pwd=Z0RrdkZXQm4xRGE3Q2cvbEFLcUxqdz09)

*Meeting ID: 883 1681 7664*

*Passcode: Nero*

Registrations for our July programme of **Historic Walks and Events**, have been excellent. We have also welcomed around half-a-dozen new members to R.L.H.S., inspired by the activities on offer:

**A/. Thursday, 1st. July @ 2.30 - A Walk in the Park, Peter Finch**

**B/. Thursday, 8th. July @ 2 o'clock prompt - Insole Court, Alun Salisbury**

**C/. Thursday, 15th. July @ 2.30 - Cathays Cemetery, Gordon Hindess / John Farnhill**

**D/. Thursday, 22nd. July @ 2.30**

**Plus ça change: Traces of Old Cardiff, Geraint Denison-Kurg**

**E/. Thursday, 29th. July @ 2.30 - St. Margaret's Church, Jean Rose**

As a Society, R.L.H.S. is a member of the **British Association for Local History** (BALH), through whom we get our Public Liability cover. Our membership of BALH means that individual R.L.H.S. Members are entitled to access their resources.

It is well worth looking at their website: <https://www.balh.org.uk> it contains much information, interesting articles, annotated short talks etc, about all manner of British history.

As announced in the March E-Newsletter, **Jeff Childs** has been awarded the **2021 BALH Award for Personal Achievement in Local History**.

This year BALH's AGM, presentation and lecture will take place online. This gives us all the opportunity to pre-register and attend (at least some of ) the proceedings; showing Jeff our appreciation and support.



**1.30** Commences with the British Association for Local History **AGM 2021**

**2.00** Local History Awards

Followed by the BALH Annual Lecture:

*Local history after the pandemic: some thoughts for the future*

Prof. Nick Barratt,

Director of Learner and Discovery Services, The Open University

All are welcome, but it is essential to pre-register in order to receive the log in details: [www.balh.org.uk/events](http://www.balh.org.uk/events)

• *Following the 12th. June, the video will be available on the BALH website*

Upon reading that we planned to visit **Insole Court** in July, Artist and R.L.H.S. Member, **Dorcas Pennyfather** mentioned to me, the exhibition she had created for Insole's re-opening in 2017. Subsequently, I asked Dorcas if she would like to re-visit the event in an article for us. Happily, Dorcas offered a choice of two, both of which I'm sure you'll find very interesting. This month it's *Below Stairs at Ely Court - 1901* and in July, we can look forward to *Romances at Ely Court*. But first, a little about Dorcas herself:

*As a very mature B.A. art student, I developed an interest in my family history. My father had drawn up the tree during the days of long visits to the archives to trawl through miles of microfiche. Lots of names and dates but nothing to give me any idea as to my ancestors' characters or how they lived. But I followed the advice of genealogists, 'start with what you know.'*

*My maternal Granny taught me how to knit when I was in primary school and I've continued throughout my life. I never met my blacksmith Grandfather as he died in 1913. I know very little about their short life together and have none of their keepsakes or photos so I wanted to commemorate them in some way. That is when I produced my first artwork depicting their lives.*

*I took an old horseshoe to represent my grandfather and a piece of lace knitting, in horseshoe stitch, to represent my Granny, added a label with their names, occupations and wedding date then mounted and framed them. This grew into a larger project entitled 'Marriages' so when I heard that Insole Court, with its art gallery, was re-opening, I jumped at the chance to propose an exhibition based on the servants who lived there.*

*I met Gaynor Howard, a Friend of Insole Court, who showed me some of her research on the house whilst I burrowed into the records such as censuses and marriage certificates. Soon I had enough material for an exhibition.*

### **Below Stairs at Ely Court - 1901**

Much has been written about the Insole family but little reference given to their servants, yet they played an important part at Ely Court.

Unfortunately, few records exist for this cohort of people, just the ten yearly censuses, unless any of them did something newsworthy, so most have left little trace of their lives. Often the census returns gave inaccurate information as it was inadvertently mis-recorded. The Mr Insoles, who were responsible for providing the details to the enumerators, may not have known their staff as well as they thought, especially regarding ages and places of birth or even their true names. Servants weren't faultless either as they too may have

hoodwinked the Mr Insoles by giving a fallacious name, age or place of birth. No proof of identity was required in those days!

Over the years the number of live-in servants grew from three in 1861 to nine in 1911, however none were found on more than one census. This wasn't uncommon as most were young females and being in service was seen as the precursor to marriage.

In 1901 George Insole employed seven live-in servants.

At the top of the pecking order was Rachel J Jenkins, (32), the cook, born in Nantyglo. She reported to Mrs Insole and, in this year, provided meals for the family which included Mr George Insole and their four sons. As Mr Insole was a big wig in the area there may have been large dinner parties to cater for. Nothing more is known about Rachel's life.

Next came Annie Orchard (24), a warehouseman's daughter from Coity. Being Mrs Insole's lady's maid Annie would have received a little more education than a regular servant. Her duties included styling Mrs Insole's hair and helping her dress so it was important she knew the etiquette of what clothes should be worn when. She was also responsible for making simple alterations and repairs to her mistress's clothes and accompanying her on trips away from the house.

Annie moved to Dinas Powys to become a governess to three young boys. In July 1915 she married Alfred Horsell, a monumental mason and later that year had their only child. Here their known story ends.

Emma Lang Finch (27) worked as the parlour maid. She was raised on a farm in Quethiock, Cornwall. Emma performed the lighter duties of housekeeping as well as waiting on table. She would have been familiar with the opening of the front door of Ely Court as it was her responsibility to answer the doorbell and greet the visitors.

In 1911 Emma was found living above Octavius Bland's confectionery shop, Newport, employed as an assistant in the restaurant. She died later that year.

Below Emma were two housemaids, Jessie A Symes (29) and Elizabeth Kear (20). Jessie was born in Bury St Edmunds in 1872, this is all that's known about her.

Elizabeth's father was a woodman and the family lived in Monmouth. Bessie, as she was affectionately named on one census, was one of the younger servants at Ely Court. She and Elizabeth would have done much of the heavy work in the house, the cleaning, washing as well as helping the cook prepare the meals. But a few years later, in 1908 Elizabeth married Albert Taylor, a railway engine stoker; they had two children and that's where their story goes cold.

Amy Robins (18) was the kitchen maid, the youngest and lowest of the servants; she was born in Pershore, Worcestershire to an agricultural labourer William and his wife Sarah. She would have been the first up and the last to bed, cleaning the cooking range and doing the washing up including the huge heavy pans and the many knives, forks and spoons as there was a set for almost every course served. In 1907 Amy married a railway engine cleaner, Albert Trimming, from Holloway, London.



But Albert was ambitious as, by 1911, he was a G.W.R. policeman based at Paddington Station. By this time he and Amy had two sons. Their two daughters, born in 1910 and 1911 died in infancy in 1912. Albert served in WWI, then the couple, with their sons, emigrated to Idaho in 1920. Albert died in 1946, Amy in 1948; they were both sixty four.

There was one other servant in the house, nurse Annie John from Prince Leopold Street, Cardiff; her father was a timber measurer. Like the lady's maid, Annie would have been regarded as superior to the maids but it's unclear as to what sort of nurse she was. At the time of the census the children were thirteen, eleven and six years old so maybe she looked after the youngest, Alan Insole. Annie was back at home in Talworth Street, with her mother, two brothers and sister by 1911. She'd given up her profession as a nurse and was earning her living as a dressmaker on her own account. And that is all that's known for certain about her.

**[dorcaspennyfather.wordpress.com](http://dorcaspennyfather.wordpress.com)**

**Ruperra Castle Preservation Trust** *has produced a new video*

## **THE VANISHED GARDENS OF RUPERRA**

<https://youtu.be/l6fuFaeuivY>

It focuses on the history of the gardens at Ruperra Castle and their future potential. Ruperra's deer park dates from Mediaeval times. Its parkland and garden, which includes a Grade 2 Listed Edwardian Greenhouse, are significant enough to be included on Cadw's Register of Historic Gardens in Wales. At one stage a dozen gardeners were employed in the grounds.

The video also looks at how the ruined gardens and house at Aberglasney in Carmarthenshire were transformed to become a stunning and extremely popular visitor attraction and shows what might be possible at Ruperra.

R.C.P.T. has also invited us, free-of-charge, to the following two zoom lectures (the same link and login details, apply to both).

**Thursday 3rd June at 7.30**

***Story of a tribal leader : Caractacus who became a hero***

**Professor Emeritus Ray Howell**

**Thursday 17th June at 7.30**

***O Dduwiau i Ddelweddau: From Gods to Heroes***

**Dr Elin Jones**

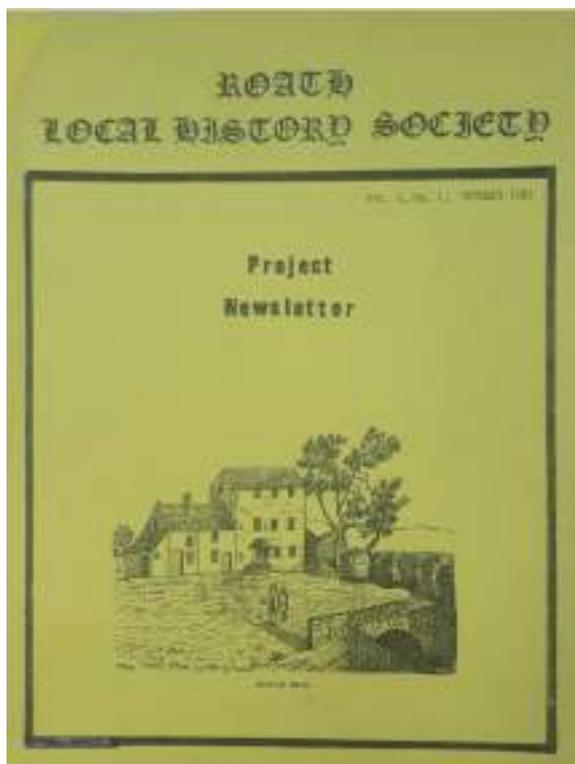
[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83827571884?  
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**Meeting ID: 838 2757 1884**

**Passcode: 763454**

## RLHS Project Newsletter Digitisation complete

Ged Richards, Chair



Between 1983 and 1991 Roath Local History Society published twenty eight editions of our Project Newsletter. They contained mainly output of research carried out by our members and also news items and some visit reports etc.

Some years ago, maybe even before I had attended a RLHS meeting, I spotted a ramshackle collection of these RLHS Project Newsletters at Pen-y-lan library. I was fascinated by them but also feared that their deteriorating condition may lead to a loss of historical knowledge of the area.

When I joined the RLHS Committee I was relieved to find that there were other copies of the Project Newsletter in our library and in a better condition. I was pleased when I gained the Committee's consent to start to digitise the Project Newsletters and publish them on the [RLHS website](#). Digitisation not only preserves the research work done by our members in the 1980's but also makes it available to a wider audience. Much of that early work ended up appearing in a modified form in Jeff Childs's book [Roath, Splott and Adamsdown - One Thousand Years of History](#) (copies available to purchase at our meetings).

Digitising the Project Newsletters has taken me over two years. It was made much easier by the advent of OCR (Optical Character Recognition). This enables an image of a page from the Project Newsletter to be 'read' and copied into a programme such as Word for further editing. The success of the OCR programme to read the image very much depends on the quality of the original page. In early volumes the quality was poor and faint meaning much further editing was required. OCR does not cope very well with tables and these often required re-typing. Images had to be copied separately into the new document.

Some may ask why didn't I just copy the pages of the Project Newsletters as images and publish those on the website? Well, there were two main reasons. If the original text in the Project Newsletter was hard to read then just copying it as a picture would also leave readers struggling to read it. The main reason however is being able to search documents using Google and other search tools. This can only be done if the documents are digitised. Now that the Project Newsletter have been digitised they will start showing up when people do a search. This not only helps researchers but also increases traffic to our website and helps make people more aware of RLHS.

And so tonight I may treat myself to a beer having uploaded the last of the Project Newsletters onto our website less than an hour ago.

What next? I think I heard that there was a series of 'occasional papers' also published by RLHS. Maybe I could think about tackling these next.

## Lady Margaret High School foundation stone



The foundation stone of Lady Margaret High School for Girls was preserved after the building was demolished. The foundation stone is dated November 16th 1948. By the time the school closed it had become co-educational and renamed Howardian High School. You need to be an intrepid explorer to find it these days - hidden deep in the bushes on a wall opposite the Colchester Avenue shops. I'm sure my scratches will soon heal.

## The Roath Local History Society Library and Archive

Having for many years been in the custodianship of Honorary Life Member, **Peter Gillard**, the Library and Archive has found a new home with Committee Member, **Geraint Denison-Kurg**.

The collection includes many rare volumes relating to the history of Cardiff, and is held as a resource for members to use for research purposes and for their general interest.



A catalogue of the collection is contained in the PDF accompanying this E-Newsletter. However, please note that this was now compiled some time ago and is in the process of being updated. All members are able to borrow from the library on a monthly basis. If you wish to do so, please contact Geraint at:

**[Denison-Kurg@outlook.com](mailto:Denison-Kurg@outlook.com)**

or by telephone on:

**(029) 2048 8358**

(leave an answerphone message if there is no answer) Geraint will then be happy to deliver the book to you, or you can arrange collection from him in Penylan if more convenient.

Books will be loaned for one month, which can be extended for the purposes of research by mutual agreement if not requested by another member, and should be returned to Geraint at the address provided before the end of the loan period.

Members are asked to borrow no more than four books at any one time.

Alternatively, if you have any books relating to the history of Cardiff or Roath which you feel would enhance the collection, please do let us know; we apologise in advance that we cannot accept duplicates or books relating to other topics, however valuable, due to a shortage of available space.

Don't forget to put your name down, if you intend coming on any of our July events,

Looking forward to a sunny June, with all good wishes,

 **Elizabeth Morgan, R.L.H.S. Honorary Secretary.**

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