

THE RECORDER



THE ANNUAL NEWSLETTER OF THE WILTSHIRE RECORD SOCIETY

EDITORIAL

The AGM this summer was held on the 7 June in the Jenner Hall at Cricklade, high up in the north of the county, close to the Gloucestershire border. Numbers were down, but this may have been due to other events being on the same day. No speaker had been booked, as it was felt the visit to Cricklade Museum, which was to follow the meeting, would be sufficient. Unfortunately, the Curator failed to turn up to open the Museum. However, Dr Virginia Bainbridge nobly came to the rescue with a short talk about her work on the Cricklade volume of the VCH, which was most enlightening. Tea, (which was taken amid an influx of Bournemouth Male Voice Choir members, who had been double booked with us), was followed by a visit to St Sampson's Church, a fine 15th century wool church, and members were able to spend some time looking at its glories.



St. Sampson's Church, Cricklade

The Society's 2009 Annual Meeting will be held on 13 June at 2.30 pm in East Knoyle Village Hall (adjacent to the parish church). After the business meeting Professor Caroline Dakers will speak on 'Victorian landed estates and their owners in south-west Wiltshire' and, as well as refreshments, there will be an opportunity to explore this interesting village.

Sally Thomson, Editor

NANCY STEELE

Nancy Steele, who died aged 92 on 17 October 2008, was a most active and respected member of this society for over thirty years. She served as secretary for 13 years from 1971. On stepping down in 1984 she continued her important role of arranging the food for annual meetings (prepared by her local Womens Institute), that contributed greatly to making these events the success that they have been over the years. She resigned her membership in 2001 and soon after moved away to a nursing home in Ilfracombe near her son and his wife. She had been, for many years, archivist to the Earl of Radnor, and listed the family papers that remain in Longford Castle. It was in that capacity that I got to know Nancy well on her frequent visits to the Record Office to research the history of the family and its estates. Her enthusiasm and cheerfulness leave a lasting memory to all who knew her.

Steve Hobbs

Life and Death in Thirteenth-Century Wiltshire

Working on an edition of court records of 1268, as I have been doing, has sometimes felt a bit like looking through the headlines of a rather sensational local newspaper. They seem to be all about death, crime and money for the government. Much legal business in the thirteenth century was done by itinerant justices from the king's central courts, holding sessions for each county. The hearings were known in English as the eyre, from the Latin *in itinere*, the justices being 'on their journey'. Most of the business was divided between civil pleas (actions between litigants, mostly concerned with the conveyancing of property) and Crown pleas, which included the punishment of crime. I am trying to complete an edition of the Crown Pleas of the Wiltshire Eyre of 1268, which Brenda Farr began nearly thirty years ago. Ill health, and then her death at the beginning of 2007, prevented her from finishing it, but her daughter Jane kindly found a text and translation among her papers.

About half of the 600-odd entries on the roll of Crown pleas relate to violent death, mostly murders, but including accidents and seven suicides. The commonest accidental deaths were by drowning, which claimed 17 people, but 11 people were run over or hit by carts, 6 died in falling from a horse (besides one who drowned when he fell from his horse) and 6 in being struck by a horse or draught animal. So what would today be traffic accidents may have accounted for more accidental deaths than rivers and pools. Mills were dangerous places: four men were crushed by mill-wheels, and one by the sail of a windmill.