

VCH Shropshire

Annual report for the year ending 31 August 2019

The VCH county committee has pleasure in presenting its report for the year.

The year has been dominated in various ways by Wem. Unfortunately the publication of the Wem Short took place after the year end so the fruits of this, and other important initiatives, fall outside the range of this report. On a number of fronts though, good progress has been made and we have real achievements to report.

The committee and officers of VCH Shropshire remained unchanged over the year except in one respect. Nigel Semmens resigned from the committee at the end of 2018 when he moved away from the county. We were sad to see him leave, not least because of his skills and considerable success in securing publicity for us.

Funding

The accounts are attached to this report. Many of our activities were funded from the balances that we mentioned last year but the Newport Scoping Study was entirely funded by a grant from Newport Town Council and the Victoria County History Trust. We also received a grant of £7,000 from the Marc Fitch Trust, but this had not been paid over by the end of the financial year and so does not appear in these accounts. We received a further grant from the Walker Trust to whom we are grateful. And at the very end of the financial year we received a grant from the Betton Fund of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society towards the cost of the Wem Short.

As in previous years, whilst the balances look healthy, much of this money is already committed and some of it ring-fenced for the advancement of particular projects.

Wem

The Wem Short was rewritten three times in 2018: to incorporate new material at the request of VCH Central Office which made it longer, then to shorten it to 75,000 words which was still unacceptably long to Central Office and rewritten again to a length of about 60,000 words. It was then resubmitted in this shortened version at the beginning of 2019. It was passed for publication at the end of February with an undertaking that copies would be available in early 2020. In fact the publication process proved to be shorter than that and at the year end the proofs were settled and ready for indexing. We therefore anticipate the volume will be available for sale before the end of 2019.

The travails of this volume have taken up a great deal of Dr Judith Everard's time and that of individual committee members, especially Dr Bowen's. We thank all of them for struggling with a difficult publication process extending over two years with more patience and good humour than was reasonable. We also benefitted from the help of Dr Nigel Tringham from VCH Staffordshire who read a late draft for us and made suggestions for its improvement.

Wem Rural

Given her heavy commitment to seeing the Wem Short through successive recensions and then the press, Dr Everard was unable to devote as much time to the accounts of the townships of Wem Rural as either she or the committee would have liked. By the end of the

year accounts had been drafted for seven of the ten townships (although all of them needed some additional material adding into them). It was intended that text of the first of the seven townships would be posted on the VCH Shropshire website towards the end of the calendar year.

VCH Shropshire VI (ii), Shrewsbury part two

Again, progress on Shrewsbury has been slower than anticipated. We published on the website a number of draft accounts of aspects of Shrewsbury's history, and will continue to do this over the next year. Professor Hoyle continued to gather material on a number of aspects of the town's history but the chief developments lay elsewhere.

First, the Nonconformist group (Dr Rosemary Thorne, Lyn Leach and Jonathan Davies) continued their work on the nonconformist chapels and congregations of Shrewsbury. By the end of the year this was largely complete and it is envisaged that it will be published in 2019-20.

Second, the Marc Fitch Fund kindly made VCH Shropshire a grant towards the completion of the Church of England churches section of the book. As reported last year, we have an incomplete typescript of uncertain age to which several hands have added material over time. With the balance of a grant from the Fitch previously made, we have a sufficient war chest to complete this section, including the churches which have not yet been previously treated. We hope to make a start on this in the new financial year once Wem Rural has been completed.

VCH Shropshire XII (i), Newport

Following our failure to win funding from the Hhe scoping study mentioned in the report for last year was cut back to an examination of the sources for and costs of writing a history of Newport alone. The shortfall in funding was made up by a grant from the Victoria County History Trust. This allowed Dr Everard and Ms Horton (as our buildings historian) to be employed to look closely at what needed to be done, the sources available and the likely costs. The scoping study was delivered to Newport Town Council at the end of March.

The scoping study is available on our website at <http://www.vchshropshire.org/Newport.html>

It was launched at a Newport History Day on 11 May when the VCH team, together with Mrs Fletcher, spoke to a good and interested audience (nearing 80) at the Cosy Hall in Newport. The immediate consequence of this was that a small transcribing group of Newport History Society members was established whose first task was to transcribe the Valuation Office Survey (the Lloyd George survey of c. 1912) for Newport. We expect to be able to report further on the activities of this group in our next report. One of their members is also assessing the extent to which the Newport probate inventories (held at the Staffordshire Record Office) have been transcribed by earlier researchers.

We expect that during the next year the first sections of the Newport book will be posted on our website.

At the very end of the year Wendy Horton led a group of volunteers measuring the frontages on Newport High Street on two successive Sunday mornings. Whilst properly an activity of the Newport History Society (and funded by Newport Town Council), we look forward to hearing what contribution the results make to our understanding of the history of the town.

VCH Shropshire very much wishes to thank its supporters in Newport including the Town Council, Linda Fletcher and the Newport History Society, and the transcribing group.

Shropshire Record Series

Whilst not directly a matter of concern for VCH Shropshire, the committee has also taken an interest in the future of the series. We understand that Keele will allow the series to lapse after the volume recently published but would be willing for it to move to new management or a new institutional base. We very much hope that people within the county will pick up the series which we regard as being an important resource for our own work and a possible outlet for some of our research.

Publicity and activities

Four email newsletters were issued. Our annual meeting on 27 October 2018 attracted a good turnout to hear Professor Peter Edwards (himself a Shropshire man) talk on 'Horses in Early Modern Shropshire: for Service, for Pleasure, for Power'. Other than the annual meeting our major public appearance was at the Newport History day in May, but Judith Everard spoke to a number of local societies and was joined on one occasion by Wendy Horton. Committee members also 'manned' a stand at the Shropshire Local History day at the Shirehall in September 2018.

Finally, we accepted an invitation to contribute a red box (literally so) to the 120th anniversary celebrations of VCH. The box was filled with objects emblematic of the history of the county (but no perishables!). Mary MacKenzie and Nigel Hinton masterminded this for us. At some time in the future, the box and contents will come back to Shrewsbury and be put on display.

October 2019