



Annual General Meeting 2021

The 2021 AGM was recently held in the Education Room, in the Cathedral Cloisters in Wells. Having been re-elected as Chairman, Dr Robert Dunning welcomed those present to the meeting. In doing so, he reflected on the fact that there had been a close relationship between the Cathedral and the Society since its inception.

The formal business of the AGM then followed, starting with a review of the previous year's AGM minutes, the Annual Report of Council and the Hon. Editor's Report which were all accepted by the meeting. Following this, the Statement of Accounts, together with the Hon. Treasurer's report were accepted by the meeting. Four members of Council were retiring by rotation, but eligible for re-election: Robert Dunning, Michael Hicks, David Victor and Nicholas Orme. In addition, there was a vacancy, but no nominations had been made to fill it. The four retiring members were willing to stand again and were elected. That was the end of the formal business.

Dr Dunning then gave a talk entitled, *The Archaeology of Wells*, which will be published on this website in the near future. He began with the observation that in 1311 Bishop John Droxford, demanded the executors of his two immediate predecessors send him the registers of his two predecessors which he needed to carry out his duties. This was far from the only occasion. Wells was not a safe place for archives.

Fast forward to the 19th century, when the Ecclesiastical Commissioners came to Wells to carry out their purpose of equalising ecclesiastical revenues. This resulted in the transfer to London of documents belonging to the dean and chapter, the bishop, the dean, the vicars choral, the archdeacon of Wells, the precentor and the sub-choral.

From about 1840 Thomas Serel, sometime bookseller in the city, began to buy interesting historical documents. He found a Wells butcher using an old register of wills to wrap his meat in.

In 1871 the Historical Manuscripts Commission published its first survey relating to Wells out of 'a mass of parchments almost wholly without arrangement and in varying stages of preservation'.

In 1885 the efforts of Bishop Edmund Hobhouse, formerly bishop of Nelson, New Zealand and the Revd. J.A. Bennett, vicar of South Brent were thwarted in their attempt to get together an inventory of the contents of the office of the diocesan register. Eventually, a deal was negotiated (for a fee) which allowed Droxford's register, the first volume of the Somerset Record Society, to be published.

In 1960, Dr Dunning was permitted to look at some cathedral manuscripts in the library, including an account roll of the Vicars Choral, 1292-93 which is the subject of one chapter in the forthcoming SRS 100. It is a tiny fragment of a great archive telling the story of more than a millennium of Christian history, some of which the Society has been proud to bring to the world since 1887.

The second talk was given by Philip Ashford, *Original records at home and abroad which contribute to an understanding of Somerset's maritime history 1400 - 1700*. Mr Ashford has agreed to prepare a piece for the next issue of 'Off the record'.

The talk started with a depiction of the Somerset coast from Steep Holm, where on a clear day the entire coast may be seen from Bristol down to beyond Porlock. The history of Somerset's maritime history is at last being told. The Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society has published three volumes on trade and commerce, travel, and tourism and a fourth will follow. Some evidence of Somerset's maritime history is to be found in the Somerset Record Society volumes, there is the mention of a barge coming up the Somerset Levels with chrism in an itinerant justice's report, but it is fragmentary until the publication of volume 94, *Maritime surveys charts and sailing directions of the Somerset coast, circa 1350-1824*.

The talk covered a wide range of sources and showed how far the search has had to extend to tease out the county's maritime history.

From the National Archives there was mention of an account of customs at Bordeaux with ships sailing from Bordeaux to Brittany, presumably carrying wine and woad, and a plea roll. The latter taken from the records of the Court of Common Pleas (CP 40) involve William Ferrer and William Sumenor of Bridgwater with John Mogg of Hamp as well as John Nythe and others in the theft of a boat. Nicholas Neth of Bridgwater was a notorious mariner and pirate in the last decade of the 15th century and likely relative of John (PROB 11/2A/332).

From Southampton <https://www.southampton.ac.uk/news/2018/01/medieval-ports.page> is a university database with interactive map of the *Merchant Fleet of Medieval and Tudor England, 1400-1558* : with 142 masters with their vessels at Minehead and another 46 at Comwich. From the work of Steven Gunn of Merton College and Tomasz Gromelski of Wolfson College there are coroners' records <http://tudoraccidents.history.ox.ac.uk> which include deaths at sea. And there was more elsewhere in port books, wills and other sources examined by Mr Ashford. Examples were given of trade, from Minehead with Brittany and Newfoundland, from the will of a mariner there, who died in Pembrokeshire; along the coast to South Wales and from an exchequer customs investigation of the suspicious comings and goings to and fro along the Severn Estuary to Ireland or France; of a salt trade with La Crosie; and of munitions and Irish refugees passing through Minehead, all in the early part of the seventeenth century.

The talk concluded with mention of George Hayman of Youghal about whom Mr Ashford has contributed a chapter for SRS 100.

The meeting concluded with questions and answers followed by tea and biscuits.