

CLHS Newsletter December 2020



Dear Member

1. AGM

Minutes of the 35th Annual General Meeting held remotely by zoom on Wednesday 9th December and associated papers were circulated to members as an email attachment on Monday 14th December.

2. AGM reflections

Christmas in 1920 – Katherine Slay

A balanced, all embracing look at Chichester through the lens of *The Observer* including, shops, guides, scouts and the Cathedral and the reflections of the Dean which appeared not to mention influenza (the number of deaths had fallen from a peak in 1918). In many ways we are the same people as 100 years ago.

Reminiscence - Peter Durnford

A reminder that despite the irritation, inconvenience, uncertainty and loss of 2020, our parents endured much more. Peter introduced poems from his father, John Durnford. John was a Japanese prisoner of war and spent three years working on the Burma Railway, an experience recorded in his book *Branch Line to Burma*, published in 1958. How his father survived the three years as a prisoner of war is beyond comprehension, and an example to all, sustained by his ability to communicate his experience through poems.

Stories from a guide to Chichester - Ann Scicluna.

Anne repeated a story told by Keith Masters who for forty years had been responsible for keeping the clock on the Cross, wound and on time. The master clock faced North Street and the other three faces were subservient to it. All well and good other than in times of snow when its weight impeded the arms of the clock. The solution was for Keith to climb through a trap door lean out across the subservient faces and knock off the snow. The only safety that of an assistant who kept hold of Keith's legs as he leant perilously from the top of the Cross.

Evacuation into Chichester in 1939 – Terry Carlyle

Two brothers aged eight and eleven, each with a suitcase were removed from their parents in south London and yet they had fun. Installed initially with Mr and Mrs Powell in Bell Lane, Birdham and then at the home of Mrs Daines, a devout widow and regular churchgoer. The boys were taken to church regularly though could play in the park in the

afternoon, a football having been discreetly hidden. The picture was of boys with an indomitable spirit and zest for life, an example of hope.

‘Did you see our “Jalopy” in Chichester?’ - Alan Green.

A silent film shown, with permission of Screen Archive South East, to which Alan provided an insightful and detailed commentary. The film dates from 1953 with the object of promoting the film *Hiawatha* (directed by Kurt Neuman, starring Vincent Edwards and Yvette Dugay) to be shown at The Granada, in East Street. A car, with an exuberant Hiawatha is shown travelling up and down East Street and along South Street. A showing enhanced by Alan’s informed, amusing, relevant and bus-detailed commentary.

3. South Downs Villages

Andrew Berriman

As indicated in his AGM Secretary’s Report, Andrew is embarking on a new project in 2021. It is not that dissimilar to his 2020 Lockdown articles, but with a twist. In the likelihood that ‘live’ CLHS meetings may not be held for some while yet, he intends to write and circulate to CLHS members by e-mail a series of twice-monthly articles about South Downs Villages. They will focus on villages near to Chichester, and within the boundaries of the South Downs National Park. The first two will be sent out in January, and on subsequent months, on the second and third Wednesdays. And then – this is the new twist - on the first Wednesday of the following month he will lead a guided walk, at 10.30am, for an hour or so, around one of the these two villages, whichever is most suited to such an activity. Andrew intends to write about 50 such articles over the next few months; twelve of them are already done and dusted. Any members wishing to attend one of these guided walks will currently need to inform Andrew beforehand, to meet Covid protocols. You will also need to make your own transport arrangements to each village. More details to follow in the New Year.

Contact for Andrew:

andrew.berriman@gmail.com

4. Joe Biden and Westbourne

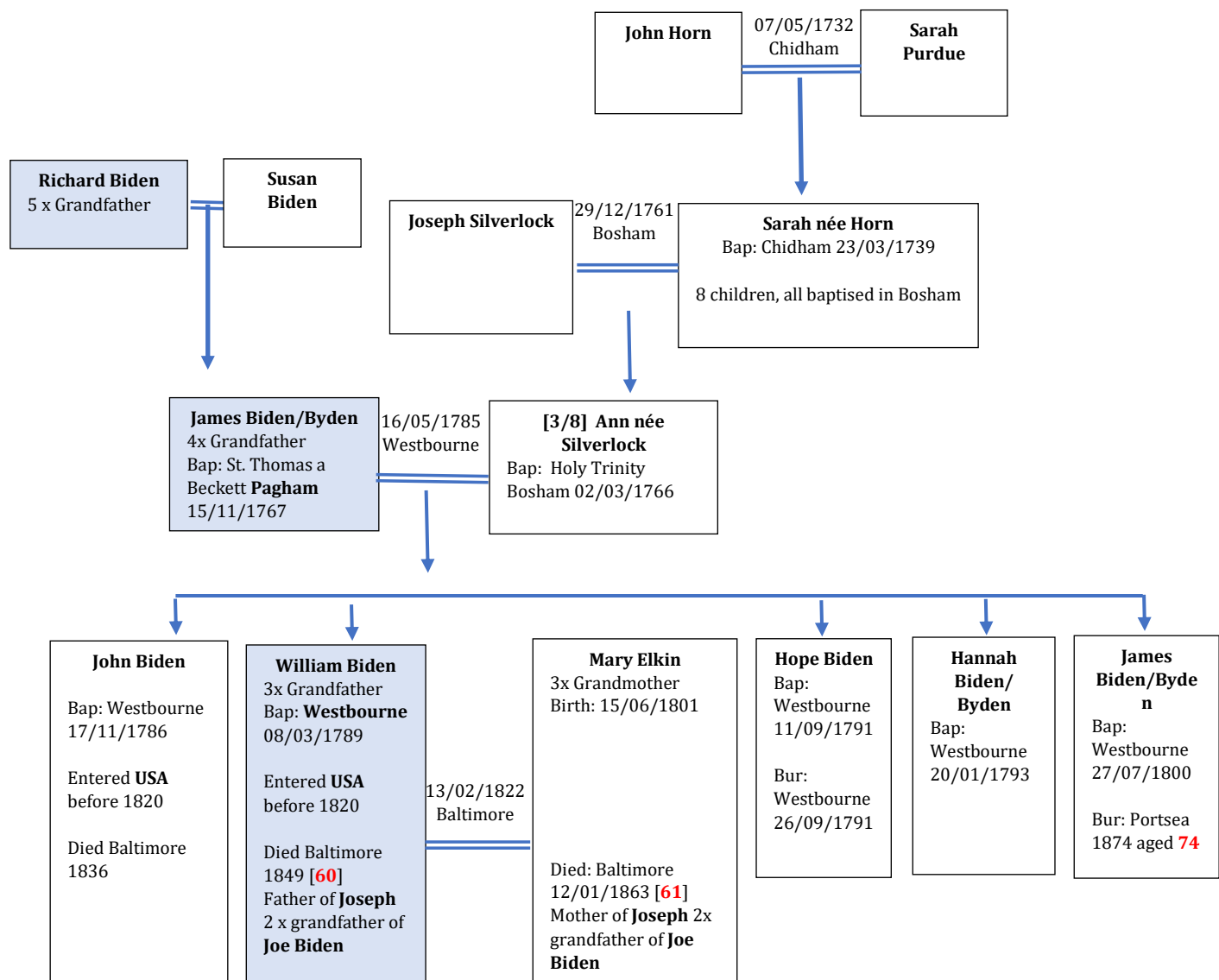
Philip Robinson

The interest arose from a report, in *The Chichester Observer*, 26th November 2020, by Eddy Greenfield of his discovery of President-Elect Biden’s links with Sussex. The claim centres on William Biden, baptised at St. John the Baptist Church in Westbourne on 8th March 1789. He was the second of five children of Ann and James Biden to be baptised at St. John’s. James Biden came from Pagham and Ann, née Silverlock, from Bosham.

At some time during the first two decades of the 19th Century William, and his elder brother John, left Westbourne for America. They are recorded in the 1820 American Census. In February 1822 William married Mary Elkin, she was 21 and William was 33. We know that after the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, agricultural wages slumped, exacerbated by the eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia in April 1815. A natural event that was followed by three summers of climatic disruption that affected harvests in the northern hemisphere. Agricultural poverty may have been the catalyst that propelled the Biden brothers to America where they appear to have prospered as evidenced in John’s will and in an inventory of William’s goods following his death in 1849. (Both in Megan

Smolenyak “*Biden’s Roots: Westbourne or Huntingdon, England or Maybe Nagpur, India?*” (megansmolenyak.com)

The challenge for local historians is to explain why John and William Biden left Westbourne. They were Sussex men, born in Sussex, as was their father, mother, maternal grandparents and great grandparents as the following ‘tree’ illustrates:

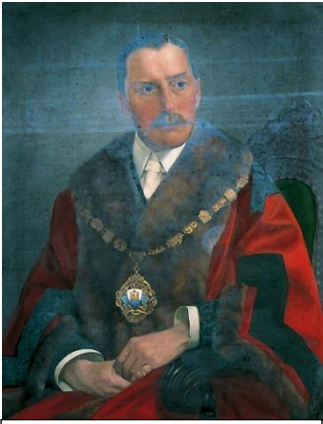


President elect Biden is quick to cite his Irish ancestors, through his mother to his great-grandparents James and Catherine Finnegan. Each was born in Ireland, James in Louth, fifty miles north of Dublin. James and Catherine are Joe Biden’s maternal great-grandparents. William Biden, born in Westbourne, is President-elect Biden’s great, great, great, paternal grandfather. A paternal ancestor not as close as that of the maternal line from Ireland, but an unambiguous Sussex connection, nevertheless. “*We wunt be druv*” could be adopted as a guiding principle to his Presidency.

5. The Mysterious Rise of Peyton T Mackeson – Part 1

Alan H. J. Green

The name Peyton T Mackeson will probably not mean much to you, and might even sound a bit like that of a Hollywood film director, but no, it is that of an influential man in Chichester, an incomer who rose in a breathtakingly short space of time to become Mayor and serve in that office for four consecutive terms from 1901.



Peyton T Mackeson seen in his mayoral robes in a portrait by Worthy Vizard, a minor artist who seems to have specialised in civic portraits. (Anne Scicluna by courtesy of Chichester City Council.

I was aware of his name from his showy 1902 coronation mugs, one of which I have in my collection, but my current interest was sparked when researching the occupations of Chichester's Victorian mayors for my *Victorian Chichester* book. I could find nothing about what Peyton T Mackeson did to earn his living so I asked of Philip Robinson what the Census had to say on the matter ; the answer was that he didn't – by the age of 37 he was living off his own means. I was intrigued.

Restricted access to WSRO means that this is very much a work in progress and at this stage the story has had to be gleaned from on-line sources such as the *British Newspaper Archive* and *Ancestry* (this last courtesy of Philip) but it is worth sharing as it has unearthed a fascinating mystery from our city's past.

Born in London in 1854 and educated at Harrow and University College Oxford, Peyton Temple Mackeson became a man of independent means at an early age and first attracts press attention when he comes down to Chichester to marry Georgina Mosely in August 1891. His bride was the third daughter of Vice Admiral Mosely of The Grange, that bizarre Victorian-gothic fantasy in Tower Street.

The wedding took place at Chichester Cathedral, and the effusive report of it (headed *A Fashionable Wedding*) occupied a whole column in the *Chichester Observer*. Many of the column inches were taken up with the list of guests and the gifts each of them had given; gifts including a grand piano, much silverware, antiques, a brass gong and Sèvres porcelain. The servants at The Grange, where the lavish reception for over 200 guests was held, had given some flower vases. The description of the bride's outfits occupied several more column inches; it was obviously no run of the mill event.

I need access to a full run of directories to ascertain precisely when Mackeson first moved to Chichester, but he is listed in the 1899 Kelly's as living at Whyke Lodge in Whyke Road, a large, amorphous Victorian house that is now a care home.

In London he had become a freemason, being initiated into the Grand Lodge on 16 May 1890 and giving his address as the Grafton Club. He joined the Chichester Lodge of Union on 1 December 1898 and this may give a clue to his arrival date, but whenever it was the press don't pick up on him again until November 1901 when he was elected Mayor of Chichester.

Amazingly he had only become a councillor the previous year but seemingly had his eye on the Top Job to which his rise was meteoric. At a special council meeting held on 9 November 1901 Mackeson was proposed as the next Mayor by Alderman Sharp Garland, but Cllr Bartlet raised a strong objection on the grounds that Mackeson was 'practically a stranger to the city' and said that he would prefer that an alderman be nominated. This is very much the attitude one would hope for since Sussex folk *won't be driv* - especially by

posh Londoners - but Cllr Bartlet's motion was unanimously overturned when put to the vote so Mackeson was duly made Mayor the very next day. He went on to be re-elected for three further consecutive terms, and at the end of his final term he was elected alderman as was customary.

Mackeson did bestow some of his wealth on the city and at the coronation of King Edward VII in 1902 he really pushed the proverbial boat out. The aforementioned coronation mugs he commissioned for distribution to children knocked Ex-Mayor Adolphus Ballard's 1897 jubilee effort into a cocked hat; it was in full colour and his own name appeared in full and in much larger letters than those of the King and Queen. He also marked the coronation by funding an extensive restoration of the Market Cross, including provision of a new clock, the faces of which survive today. At the

end of his final term he had his portrait painted for presentation to the Corporation and also presented a bronze bust of Nelson on a wooden plinth, one of a limited edition of three such made from materials recycled from HMS Victory.

As Mayor of Chichester he automatically became a city magistrate and he continued to serve as a JP for both the city and county beyond the end of his mayoralty. In 1905 he was granted the Freedom of the City, an honour bestowed by the Corporation itself rather than citizens who had no say in the matter



Peyton Temple Mackeson's 1902 Chichester Coronation Mug. It was customary for the Mayor to commission commemorative mugs for presentation to the city's children on royal occasions. Note the relative sizes of the Mayor's and Monarchs' names! (Author's collection)

So why was the rise of this incomer so meteoric? How did a relative newcomer get himself elected as councillor in the first place and why were his fellow councillors so keen to elect him mayor after only one year of service - and then re-elect him for a further three?

On the face of it here was a wealthy Londoner come down to shake up the country bumpkins, and at his first mayoral banquet in November 1901 his speech included an expression of 'curiosity' that the Councillors had chosen 'another Old Harrow Boy' as mayor; Richard Combe Miller, the previous incumbent, being a fellow alumnus. Hmm. Was it then who he knew – Old School Tie or the Brotherhood – or was it his wealth and influence or was there something else? Interestingly by 1899 Combe Miller was living in Mackeson's father-in-law's old house, The Grange.

At the aforementioned 1901 banquet he stated in his speech that he had refused to take sides in the 'vexed question' then before councillors. This vexed question might well have been a dispute that arose over the enlargement of the borough to include Rumboldswyke. If the Corporation had become disunited, was it felt that in the circumstances only an outsider could bring about unity, thus putting Mackeson head and shoulders above the disgruntled aldermen? His being of independent means should have meant that he would have much more free time to devote to the duty than any of the aldermen. Now that WSRO has reopened I can have the benefit of seeing he 'official' side

of the story contained in the Corporation minute books. Therein the records of meetings should expose the rifts and concords that existed in 1900.

In 1911 he moved from Whyke Lodge to a new house he had had built at Lavant. Designed for him by E S Prior it was named, with some irony, *The Small House* (it is anything but!) and situated at the end of a secluded drive opposite the *Earl of March*. It is still there and now listed Grade II. Here he lived out his retirement, but still serving as a JP, until ill health forced him to return to London. He ended his days in a nursing home in Southsea, where he died in August 1918.

His obituary in the *West Sussex Gazette* is glowing, describing Mackeson as 'a gentleman long and honourably connected with the public life of Chichester' and interestingly it also asserts that 'his mayoralty was marked by some rather lively passages provided by some of the more turbulent spirits on the City Council'

The minute books should also provide some insight into who those 'turbulent spirits' were, but unfortunately past experience has shewn that the 18th and 19th century Town Clerks could be somewhat selective over what they put into the minutes in times of discord so we may never get the full picture.

Hopefully I will be able to cast some more light on the mystery in a future Newsletter, and the full story will be included in *Victorian Chichester*, if and when it ever gets finished, where it will (of course!) be fully referenced.

6. **Book Review:**

Terry Carlisle

Britain and the Ocean Road: Shipwrecks and People, 1297-1825 by Ian Friel

Many CLHS members will know the talented Ian Friel from his much appreciated tenure as Curator of the Chichester District Museum, his lectures given to CLHS and many other local and national bodies, or indeed from his previous books including the much lauded *Henry V's Navy: The Sea-Road to Agincourt and Conquest 1413-1422*. However the long period of Coronavirus may well mean that they missed the publication of his latest book (part one of a two part series) - *Britain and the Ocean Road: Shipwrecks and People, 1297-1825*.

This is a fascinating read covering shipwrecks related to journeys on pilgrimage, slave trading, pirates, war (both between rival ports and countries) and exploration. Ian uses painstakingly researched accounts of 8 shipwrecks to cover these wide ranging topics yet manages to write in such an entertaining and informative style that makes this book both easy to read and highly informative at the same time – an achievement which, as we all know, is hard to attain. This book is a joy to handle, well-illustrated (with many wonderful line drawings by Ian's daughter Helen) and well produced by Pen and Sword.

If you fancy something to read over Christmas or are flummoxed over what to buy as a present for Christmas then look no further.

7. Historical Association invitation

17th December: Dr. Ellie Woodacre (Winchester University) **Catherine of Aragon and Katherine Parr: a tale of two Regencies**

To join the meeting launch zoom – the Meeting ID is **848 3454 2602** Passcode **361122**

21st January: Dr. Lorenza Gianfrancesco (Chichester University) **1631 Eruption of Vesuvius and Impact on Naples**

Next Newsletter: 29th January