

BISHOP'S CASTLE HERITAGE RESOURCE CENTRE AND HOUSE ON CRUTCHES MUSEUM

Newsletter - Autumn 2011

Town Hall Renovation Project

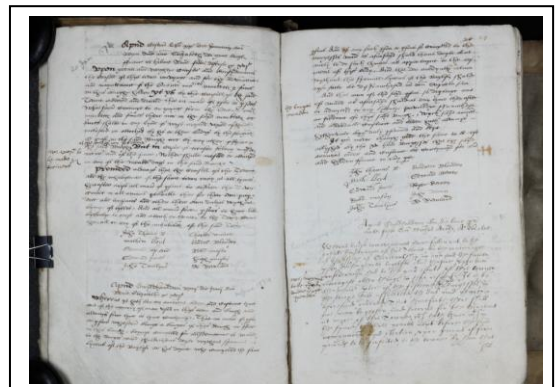
You may have seen from the Town Council's Newsletters that the community will be very much involved in plans for new heritage, art, music and other social activities to be held there. A number of volunteers at Bishop's Castle Heritage Resource Centre have already been seeking out information relating to the history of the Town Hall during the period 1750-1850 by gathering data from several sources – Shropshire Archives, Powys County Archives, National Library of Wales, National Archives at Kew – as well as our own resources. It will be looking for information on the political, social and economic life of Bishop's Castle and the building of the Town Hall, and on completion of the renovation there will be involvement

with displaying the history, possibly with dramatic representations for school children, and also with the provision of some of the BCHRC publications for sale in the Information Office as part of the Hall's function of giving greater access to local heritage.

One of the important documents we have been researching is the **Bishop's Castle Borough first Minute Book** which dates from the 17th century. This lists the original burgesses, and details the election of bailiffs, sergeants-at-mace, chamberlains, constables and town clerks with many well known family names frequently recurring such as Colbach, Oakley, Plowden, Sayce, More, Bright and Walcott, providing another useful resource for local and family historians. More meaty passages detail the rules for market traders, such as the oath to be ministered to the "searchers and sealers of leather", lots of annoying red tape then for the traders, no doubt, as now!

"You shall during your office diligently search and view within the precinct & libertys of this town and Burrough all leather red and unwrought which is brought to this town to be solde or to be offered to be solde, & you shall have a mark or seale provided for that purpose to seale the same if you find the same leather well & sufficiently tanned, & through dried according to the statute and yf you find the said leather insufficiently tanned or not through dried or yf you find any wrought wares as shoos, bootes, buskins or pantaffells insufficiently cured or made of horsehide, sheepe skins or bull hides that you seise upon the same accordingly, & retain the same till it be tryed by 6 tryers being expert men in the trade . . ."

Further passages deal with the construction of **stocks** and the provision of a **gaol** in the room below the Town Hall which meant evicting a tenant living there, whose name we think was Florence – the first woman we have come across (unless you count "Sybil" who actually turned out to be mistaken for the word "civil"!) On another occasion, in the winter of 1608, we were pleased to see that even then the delay in some measures being taken was blamed "on the extremities of the weather"! One of the main difficulties in transcribing this document is trying to decipher words which are now obsolete, with often hilarious suggestions!



BCHRC opened as a **Local History Centre** last October and since then more than 100 researchers have been able to use our extensive resources. We are open Thursday, Friday and Saturday mornings, 10.30 to 1pm, with volunteers helping visitors find the information they are seeking. **WE WELCOME MORE HELPERS**, not just to assist researchers, but also with all aspects of work at the Heritage Centre and the House on Crutches Museum, such as digitising, cataloguing, indexing oral history recordings and caring for the Museum exhibits. **If you have an interest in heritage, local or family history and would like to get involved, please contact us as overleaf.**

“JUST UP YOUR STREET” EXHIBITION



Further research at the Heritage Centre is looking at the history of individual houses in the town and, together with a mass of pictures from the SWSHAS archive as well as documents brought in by local residents, we were able to produce the display in April of this year. This focussed on the houses in Church Street and High Street and more than 300 visitors looked round the exhibition. The BCHRC's special photographic equipment was available for digitally copying documents, and the general sharing of knowledge and memories over the two-day event was enjoyed by all. One of our volunteers is compiling a database with analysis of the 1910 Land Tax Survey of Bishop's Castle and this proved to be a very popular source of

information, no doubt partly due to our volunteer's great enthusiasm for sharing these records. The outcome of the event was much more information received and opportunities for further research on various properties. It is hoped that the BCHRC will hold smaller open events at the Centre in future due to the amount of interest shown, especially with regard to digitisation.

ANNIE LAWRENCE

A sad event of this year was the death on 5th June of Annie Lawrence, co-founder with Sally Chappell of the House on Crutches Museum. When Annie was a student, she used to put her bike on the train and go cycling around Shropshire, and found lovely Bishop's Castle. Which is why, when she and Sally Chappell returned to the UK from Minorca in 1992, they thought Bishop's Castle might be a good place to make their home.

And so it proved to be. They came, they saw, they stayed; found a house, made friends, and became involved with town life.

Their first project (together with Ann Williams, a worthy co-conspirator), was the development of the House on Crutches (already restored by the Castle Lands Trust) into the Town's Museum, and later to extend the collection and other heritage-based activities into the Bishops Castle Heritage Resource Centre in Chapel Yard. Sally is still the Curator of the Museum, and Annie became the Chair of the House on Crutches Museums Collections Trust, which is responsible for both sites. Neither of these highly valued places would exist without them.

But that's not all. Annie became a Town Councillor, and a Governor of the Primary School. They were involved in the enhancement of the Playing Fields, the

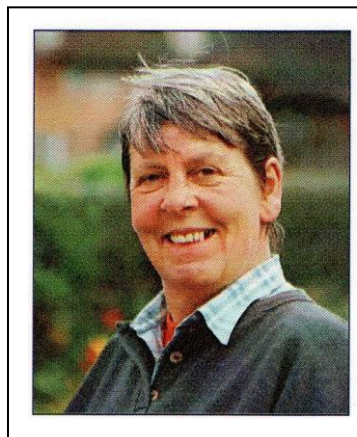
campaign to save the medicine dispensing side of the Pharmacy, and in the start-up of the Michaelmas Fair (no it hasn't been going on for ever), for which they designed and made the gorgeous banners which decorate the streets.

Annie, in particular, was a literary girl, and as well as being a voracious reader and collector of books, especially children's books as well as old toys, she wrote poetry (some scurrilous) and short stories; also our booklet "The Castle in Bishops Castle", "This Old House" (the House on Crutches), "Bishop's Castle: A Medieval Planned Town" (published in "The Gale of Life") and shortly before she died, completed a novel. We're looking forward to reading it!

In 2002 Annie suffered a debilitating stroke, and had to give up being a Councillor, as the Council Chamber is "inaccessible". She fought hard to recover, and with the support of Sally, her three sons, and three beloved grandsons, rebuilt her life, and learnt to get about at home unaided, and about town on her scooter.

However, the loss of her youngest son towards the end of 2010 was a devastating blow, from which Annie never recovered, and after suffering another series of strokes, she died in June.

We will remember her for her energy, her courage, her kindness, her outrageous sense of humour, and most of all for her strongly held and defended values.



To find out more about

Bishop's Castle Heritage Resource Centre, please contact: BCHRC, Chapel Yard, Bishop's Castle SY9 5DE
E mail: mail@bchrc.co.uk, Telephone: 01588 630556
(Please leave message on answer machine when Centre is not staffed) for information on: **Storage at BCHRC, Opportunities for Research, Hire of Facilities & Resources, Education & Outreach Materials, Helping at the Centre, Affiliation.**