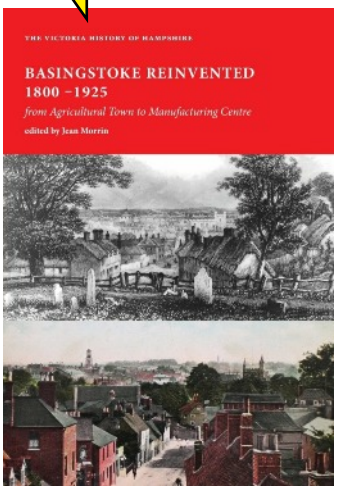
NEWSLETTER

Updating Hampshire's History

No. 26 ***Autumn 2025***

VICTORIA COUNTY HISTORY Hampshire

BOOK LAUNCH June 2025



Over 100 people gathered in Church Cottage, Basingstoke, to celebrate the launch of our sixth and most ambitious VCH Short volume

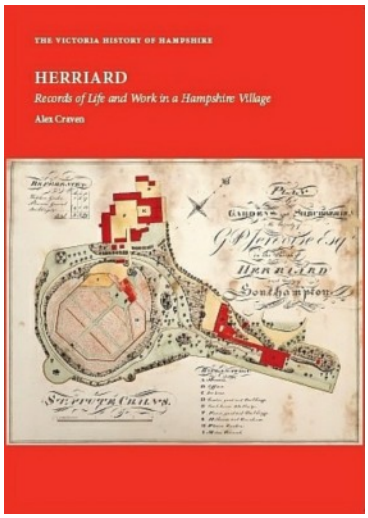
Basingstoke 1800-1925
from Agricultural Town to Manufacturing Centre

In addition to Jean Morrin and Anna McNair-Scott, our Chair, four of our team gave short presentations on their subjects of interest included in the book.

Guests below: Lady Portal, Jean Morrin, Mayor Colin Phillimore, Anna McNair Scott, Maria Miller and Cllr Kate Tuck

Church Cottage, Basingstoke

Seventh VCH Short Very Near Publication



Herriard: Records of Life and Work in a Hampshire Village

by **Alex Craven**

At the heart of the parish of Herriard, 4 miles south east of Basingstoke, lies Herriard House, the home for four centuries of the Jervoise family, who founded the parish church and built a mansion within grounds landscaped by Humphrey Repton. The book draws upon the unique Jervoise archive, containing over 250,000 items, and turns this rural parish into something extraordinary for the local historian, permitting us to see life there in remarkable detail.

It includes ordinary parishioners as it explores the social, economic, and religious history of Herriard: their homes, their work, their worship. It provides examples of agricultural improvement and model farms, complex relationships between master and servant, a short-lived light railway, a rogue who almost destroyed the estate, and much else.

NEW PROJECT - OLD BASING

We are changing our usual format. We have started the huge task of researching Old Basing for our next VCH Short, and we thought we would let you know what we are doing in relation to the various topics we are covering.
How are we going about it? ***DO YOU WANT TO JOIN IN?***

Researching the Poor of Basing, a start

Unlike its sister parish of Basingstoke, Old Basing has an unusual and impressive set of records covering two centuries relating to the parish provision of poor relief. In many places, it is believed that when the new workhouse system was established, many small parish records were simply destroyed. From 1834, the transformative Poor Law Amendment Act established poor law unions, groups of parishes, with central large workhouses. The local Union included Basing and built its workhouse on the road from Basingstoke (the site of the Hampshire Clinic today), and it was an entirely different exercise researching the system*. However, before this Act, the poor were supported by their parishes of origin under the Elizabethan Act of 1601, which formalised a system in place for hundreds of years. Basing's collection, mostly in the Hampshire Record Office, includes several overseers' account books from about 50 years before the workhouse act, settlement certificates, removal orders, bastardy papers, vagrancy passes and much more.

A start made with overseers' accounts reveals difficult documents, simple books with pages of lists of names and amounts, often with little detail and very hard to read and analyse. However, they reveal the nature of poverty in this rural parish. Later figures need to be substantiated by looking at Parliamentary Papers. The first book examined (1788-1801) reveals most of the relief, about £450 a year, was spent on normal daily necessities together with child and nursing care, layings out and funerals and so on – and, of course, rent. Notable is a very sudden, significant increase in spending by 1800, a national trend caused mostly by European wars, which continued to render the system untenable and would bring about the major changes in provision of the New Poor Law in 1834. An interesting story to be revealed.

* See *Basingstoke Workhouse and Poor Law Union*, Barbara A Large, The History Press, 2016 *Barbara Large*

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Women's Institute of Old Basing Starts Local History Initiative

Founded in March 1919, Old Basing Women's Institute (WI) was one of the first to be established in Hampshire. At its inaugural meeting held at Springfield, 68 members were enrolled. A hundred years later, in March 2019, it celebrated its centenary with a special tea party at the Village Hall. Throughout its long life the WI has provided opportunities for women to socialise and engage in a wide variety of activities, both practical and of a more intellectual kind. Thus, alongside cake making and craft activities of different kinds there have been talks covering a multiplicity of subjects. To take a year at random, in 1932 a talk in February was entitled *"The power of mind over body"*, followed a month later by a lantern lecture on *"A naturalist's holiday on the Faroe Islands"*. Later in the year members heard about the League of Nations, the history of Money, and work among women in prisons. This was the year in which '*Olden Days and Nowadays'*, an initiative of Old Basing WI President Mary Hoare JP, was published, with excerpts being read at the May meeting. This laid the foundations for a local history initiative of WIs throughout the county which resulted in the production and publication in 1937 of '*It Happened in Hampshire'*.

There are three main sources of information for research. First, the short reports detailed above which were published in the *Hants and Berks Gazette,* available on microfiche in the Basingstoke Discovery Centre. Second, WI records have been deposited at the Hampshire Record Office. These include minute books, correspondence and scrapbooks, including some wonderfully evocative photographs of the 2019 celebratory tea party. Third, for contemporary history, there are articles in the *Old Basing and Lychpit Parish Newsletter* and *Basinga*. These can all be enhanced by the memories of past and current members. *Roger Ottewill*

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Researching Communal Life in Old Basing

Before the first newspapers were printed in Hampshire there is very little written evidence of communal life in Basing other than instances reported in manorial rolls, court rolls and depositions given to the consistory (spiritual) courts. Inevitably these cases deal with situations outside the normal day to day activities of a farming community, such as cattle and sheep straying on neighbours' land and destroying their crops, rent arrears, drunken arguments that led to a fight, marital disharmony, bastardy or even playing football in the churchyard. The picture these records present is distorted as, compared with other local villages, Basing was generally a quiet, peaceful and well-managed village between the Conquest and the Reformation. Annual festivals and social events were occasions to be enjoyed in between the relentless grind of daily life. *Jackie Wilkinson*

Local newspapers, in particular the *Reading Mercury*, are a useful source of information about communal life in Old Basing during the 19C. There are reports of self-help organisations, such as the Old Basing Friendly Society, sometimes with details of membership numbers, expenditure on sick pay, medical expenses and funeral costs. Other organisations included the Old Basing Working Men's Club, the Choral Society, the cricket and football clubs and the Mothers' Union. There were usually full reports of the exhibitions at the Old Basing Horticultural and Labourers Friends Society, later the Old Basing and Mapledurwell Horticultural Society, held each August in Old Basing Park. They show that in many years 2,000 people attended, and list the prizes given for the best vegetables, fruit, flowers, fowls, pigeons, rabbits, and even cats. Rural sports included, boys dipping in flour for money, drinking a pint of water with a spoon, a sack race and a steeplechase over four flights of hurdles and through the filthy canal and back. There was dancing in the evening followed by a display of fireworks. *Bob Clarke*

Looking at Old Basing's Parish Boundaries

In writing a book about Basing, one needs to define Basing. That is far from easy. Over the years there have been many changes to the parish boundary and even changes to the parish name. Most recently developments around Chineham have led to the creation of two new parishes – Chineham and Sherfield Park – which have effectively removed the north eastern projection of Basing. Around the same time as these changes the Basing parish became Old Basing and Lychpit parish. To the south, Basing did include much of Hackwood Park, but this is now in Winslade parish.

Other changes happened, but without major changes to the area of Basing. Boundaries have moved from being landscape features to being roads or railways. There were also some anomalies – a detached area to the north and east of South View, and two odd incursions by other parishes, reaching well into what is now Lychpit and another taking in what is now Eastrop Park. Meanwhile Basing reached to Eastrop lane, almost taking in Eastrop Church! Neither of these is now in Basingstoke.

Over the summer I was charged with exploring the boundaries, not just on maps but also on foot. It is just about achievable, although the existence of the Bramley camp military area and the Hackwood estate did not help and I missed out on the opportunity to walk down the centre of the Basingstoke Ring Road, the M3 and M3 spur and the A30, but just about managed to parallel Petty's Brook and the Lyde River.

All in all this suggests that the book will have to treat Basing parish as being as it was at its largest, since at least that way the links between the Paulet family with both Basing House and Hackwood House will stay in the same book. *Andrew Howard*

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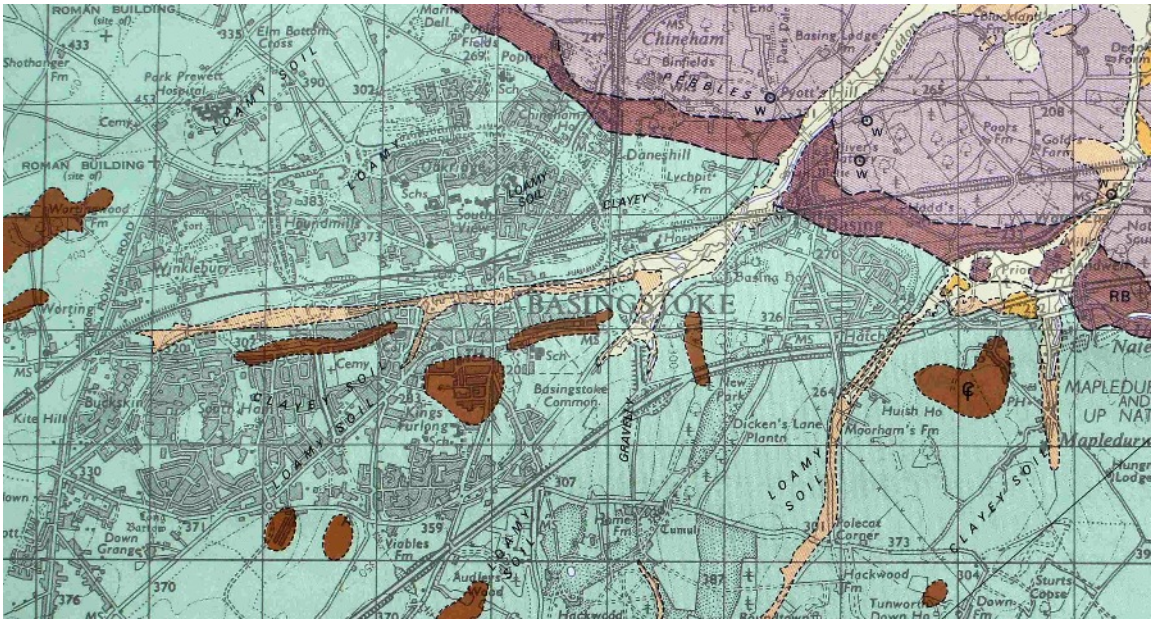
Landscape and Farming Around Old Basing



1981 Geology Map of Basingstoke and Old Basing

The distinction between chalk (**Green**) and clay (**Brown**) causes a fundamental division and difference in the ground surface environment that had a profound influence on settlement, fields and agriculture.

Basingstoke and Old Basing are adjacent parishes but their farming systems in the 18C were very different.

Basingstoke parish had about 4,000 acres and most of it lay in open common fields, surrounding a nucleated settlement. There were a few closes at the edge of the fields but basically farming continued in open field strips until parliamentary enclosure transformed the parish in 1786. This was typical of Hampshire sheep/corn farming on the chalk downland. Light soils are easy to work but dried out quickly and lost their nutrients through leaching. Sheep folded on the thin soils of the chalk lands provided essential fertiliser.

Old Basing was very different: of 5,300 acres in the parish, only 935 acres were in common fields. The village was a nucleated settlement, to the south of which lay the chalklands, so typical of much of Hampshire with open common fields which lasted until the enclosure of 1797. The land north of the village was enclosed in smaller fields with scattered settlements, such as a farmstead and a group of small fields enclosed from the woodland rather than a village. Here the mixed farming emphasised cattle rather than sheep.

Study of maps reveals the reason for this contrast.The south of Old Basing and all of Basingstoke lay on the chalk downlands (coloured green on the map) while the north of Old Basing parish lies on the clay of the Reading and London beds (coloured brown). The geology map illustrates this very clearly. *Jean Morrin*

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The Fight for Old Basing 1930-31, History and Local Government

Readers of the 27 March 1931 edition of the *Hants and Berks Gazette* would have seen inside the headline *"The Fight for Basing"* followed by the question *"Should the Village be Transferred to the Borough?"*. It is a moot point how many would have been aware of the significance of the headline and question. For local historians, however, they provide an incentive to find out more. Clearly a close reading of the newspaper report serves as the starting point for further investigation, but other sources also need to be accessed to put this into context. Essentially, it was a dispute arising from what was known as 'county review', between, on the one hand, Hampshire County Council and Basingstoke Borough Council (both of which supported the enlargement of the borough through the incorporation of the parish of Old Basing) and, on the other, Basingstoke Rural District Council and Old Basing Parish Council (opposing). Thus, the minutes of these bodies are important sources of information. However, they tend to be rather dry and formal, whereas newspaper reports offer insights into the passions aroused on matters of this kind. For example, those arguing for Old Basing to be taken over by Basingstoke Borough argued that this would address the perceived deficiencies in public service provision in the village, such as refuse disposal and water supply. They also drew attention to the extent to which the residents of Old Basing travelled to Basingstoke for employment and entertainment. Those resisting the transfer did so primarily on democratic grounds – the vast majority of the population was opposed. In the event, the villagers won the fight and even today Old Basing retains its 'independence'. In constructing narratives around controversial issues of this kind a constant challenge is to be as objective as possible, regardless of one's personal views.

Roger Ottewill

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Basing Hearth Tax, 1665

One of the sources to help us understand aspects of the history of Basing is the 1665 Hearth Tax Assessment.The Hearth Tax was introduced in 1662. It was assessed on occupiers, not landlords, and was based on the number of hearths (including fires and stoves) in the dwelling. Assuming all households were listed, as they should have been by law, there were 68 households in Basing. Using the generally accepted multiplier of 4.5 persons per household this gives Basing an estimated population of 306 (4.5 x 68). This might be an underestimate as there was a higher proportion of households with three or more hearths than in the surrounding parishes and a lower proportion of households with only one hearth.

Of the 11 occupiers whose names appear in the census, who died within 20 years of 1665 and for whom probate documents are in the Hampshire Record Office, the value of the effects of eight of them was over £100.

Smaller dwellings, which were exempted from paying hearth tax, included: houses worth less than 20 shillings a year and occupied by people whose goods and chattels were worth less than £10; those not paying parish rates; and those occupied by people on poor relief. In Basing 14.7% of households were exempted. The figures for the surrounding parishes were Sherborne St John 8.6%, Mapledurwell 41.7%, Newnham 33.3%, Sherfield on Loddon 37.3%, and Basingstoke 45.4%. Again, this suggests there was a greater proportion of wealth in Basing compared with its surroundings.

Bob Clarke

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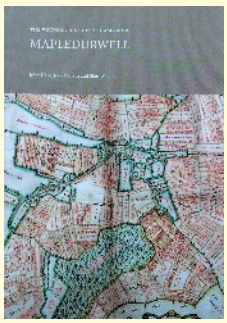
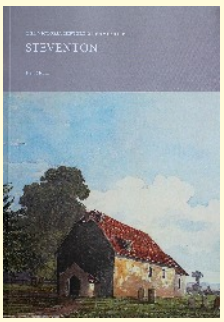
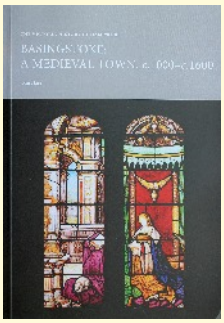


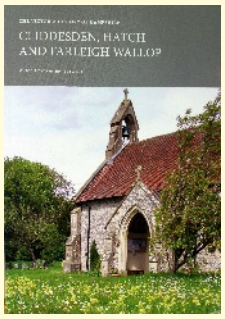
Mapledurwell



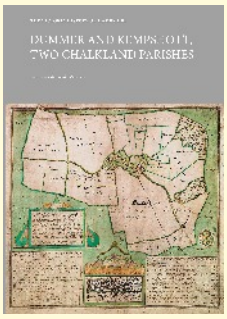
Steventon



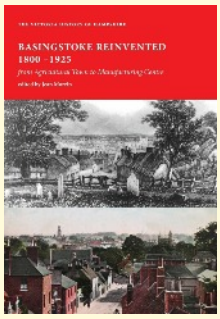
Basingstoke: a Medieval Town



Cliddesden, Hatch and Farleigh Wallop



Dummer and Kempshott



Basingstoke 1800-1925

You can buy our books from: The Willis Museum, Basingstoke and The Hampshire Record Office or by contacting us direct

https://vchhampshire.org

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Email: contact@vchhampshire.org

Find us on Facebook

Group Leader: Dr Jean Morrin, History Department, University of Winchester, Winchester, SO22 4NR

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