

Woodard Award 2025

Deliberations by Dr Steven Blake and David Aldred.

Thank you, John – and I must of course start by thanking the Society for inviting David and me to judge the annual *Woodard Award* again this year, which is always a privilege and a pleasure.

And I certainly must begin by congratulating all concerned on another excellent and varied Bulletin, and in particular of course John Dixon as editor and Rick Talbot for design and layout – and, indeed, a well-deserved recognition to whoever compiled the remarkably comprehensive index of no less than 281 entries (I made point of counting them!) which will of course enable anyone researching an aspect of the town's past to instantly and confidently check in this – and indeed in previous Bulletins – whether there is something relating to their topic of interest. In any local history publication, a comprehensive index is an absolute must.

Add to that the use of high-quality paper, a good readable font size and the crispness and clarity of the maps, plans and photographs and you have, once again, a very professional-looking publication, certainly one of the best produced of all the County's local history society publications.

And then, of course, there are the articles – five in all, by four regular contributors to your Bulletins, all of course previous *Woodard Award* winners, and all very different in subject matter – but each focusing, I would argue, on one or both of two inextricably linked themes, namely People and Place.

As far as Place is concerned, Joanne Raywood's article on Healings Mill from its optimistic origins in the 1860s to its current uncertainties stands out – and I would hope that having a comprehensive account of its past might well add strength to the continuing debate around its future, and that its future will eventually be a bright one. Inevitably, Joanne's article also includes People as well as Place, tracing as it does the history of the Healings family.

People – one well known, the other two barely so – are very much at the centre of three of the other articles. The writer John Moore – of whose rogues I am looking forward to hearing more about later this evening - is of course well known as one of Elmbury's best known inhabitants, and John Dixon's article clearly breaks new ground by researching Moore's ancestors and family background. Family history is also the basis of John's second contribution to the bulletin, which builds on his previous Bulletin article on 'Tewkesbury's unusual 20th-century resident', the Barbadian Harold Kirton, by looking in more detail at his early life and journey to Tewkesbury from the West Indies, placing that in the wider context of post-Emancipation Colonial history and – as the article's references clearly show – demonstrating the value of combining traditional and online family history sources to unravel an unusual life story.

Also building on an earlier article is Sam Eedle's account of '*the mysterious – perhaps even infamous - Mrs Wardle*', in which he answers many of the questions that readers of his earlier article might have been left with and completes a most unusual life story, which once again is placed in a wider context – in this case of English criminality, imprisonment and transportation in the early 19th century: an absorbing and fast-moving story that shows how the lives of extraordinary ordinary people can be just as absorbing as those of the more famous.

And then, finally, we come to the latest in Derek Benson's series of articles on riot, radicalism and nonconformism in Tewkesbury – a clear, concise, yet comprehensive account of the Tewkesbury Quakers, which succeeds particularly well in placing them in a wider national context, while focusing on the lives of many notable Tewksbury Quakers from the mid-17th to the 20th century, and in so doing combining both People and Place, the latter in terms of their meeting houses and burial grounds, and demonstrating the use of a particularly wide range of primary and secondary sources, including, appropriately, from the Woodard database.

Deciding on the winner of the Award is never easy, especially with such a worthy group of articles, but both David and I felt that Derek Benson's article 'had the edge', so I am very pleased to announce that Derek is the winner of the 2025 Woodard Award for article published in *THS Bulletin* 33 (2024).