

Redlynch & District Local History Society

On the Wrong Side of the Law in Whiteparish and Landford

by Dr Rosalind Johnson

'On the wrong side of the law in Whiteparish and Landford' proved to be an entertaining and informative talk by Dr Rosalind Johnson for members of Redlynch Local History Society at their AGM. Dr Johnson, as a contributing editor, is actively in the area for the Victoria County History and was able to show members not only how to access sources but also gave local examples. Members learnt how the History project was started in 1899 and that 25 volumes are planned for Wiltshire; Whiteparish and Landford are to be in number 21.

Examples of transgressions of the law spanned the centuries from 1268 through to the early 20th century and ranged from cases of fowl theft through poaching and trespass, a major problem in the 19th century, to bigamy. The latter example, a rare instance, gave an insight into the Victorian public's interest in the subject. It culminated in the two women victims going together to the police to report the crime. The perpetrator, after 9 months in Winchester Prison, went back to his legitimate wife but had to pay for the upkeep of his baby daughter by his second 'wife'.

Those who were drunk and disorderly suffered the indignity of a fine if things got out of hand. Opportunities, far greater in Whiteparish with a couple of inns than in Landford with none, were reflected in the number of cases. The former also had a constable who no doubt knew the route home likely transgressors might take. Corrupt officialdom though was evident in the 13th century when three men were each fined half a mark (roughly equivalent to £500) for harbouring thieves. One of the men, a charcoal maker, was hardly likely to have had this sort of money, but it also indicated the importance of woodland to the economy at the time.

All in all, an excellent talk by a member of the Society.

Victoria County History website link below:

<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/wilts/vol11/pp19-77#h3-0003>

Our next talk is "From Woodfalls to Rangoon" by Sonia Aarons-Green at 7.30pm 2nd November at Morgan's Vale & Woodfalls Hall.

Bob Inns, Secretary

October 15th 2021