

WESTENDER

Newsletter of the West End Local History Society
Spring 2026



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The Moorgreen Inn as it was in the 1950s and 1960s

Photo credit: Barry Topp

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**The A.G.M. will be held in April and we would welcome nominations for Committee posts.
If we do not fill key posts, the Society – and the museum – will have to close.**

A Question of Murder
By Sue Ballard

There is an old joke among family historians that they should beware of finding bigamists and murderers in their family tree. In mine, I found a murder suspect and several unanswered questions.

On the 30th September 1782, the Hampshire Chronicle carried a report on a forthcoming murder trial. Elizabeth Vere, a young woman from South Stoneham, had been found dead in what came to be known as Miller's Pond in Sholing. The report stated that she had been beaten about the head badly enough to force an eye from its socket and that her neck was broken. Suspicion immediately fell on her sweetheart, Richard Parker, on the testimony of her friend from West End, who was never named.

This Richard Parker (c.1760-1815) belonged to one of the four major interconnected families of Itchen Ferry – the Diapers, Cozens, Jurds and Parkers – and was the great-great uncle of that Richard Parker (c.1867-1884) who was sadly and famously cannibalised when shipwrecked. The accused Richard was baptised at South Stoneham on 13th June 1760, one of nine children and the eldest son of Richard Parker and his wife Elizabeth Fry. Elizabeth Vere had been his sweetheart for over three years prior to her murder and they usually met on a Sunday afternoon. "A young woman from West-End" (an early reference to the place name locally), declared that on the 8th September she had set out with Elizabeth, who was on her way to meet Richard in the lane leading from Itchen Ferry towards Bursledon. She claimed that Elizabeth was afraid to meet him and was going to turn back, but that she had persuaded her to go with an old saying "that the falling out of lovers was the renewal of love". She did not say specifically that she saw Richard & Elizabeth meet. At what point did this unnamed friend turn back?

The report states that Elizabeth was laid in a field of barley and covered with straw and branches, where she remained from the Sunday night to the following Wednesday evening, "when the murderer dragged her from this situation under his arm and threw her into a pond at the bottom of the lane". Richard Parker was arrested and examined but released due to lack of evidence against him. The following day he attended Elizabeth's funeral "and appeared very much affected upon the occasion and threw out some new indications of guilt".

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Miller's Pond – the only pond in the vicinity of “the lane leading from Itchen Ferry towards Bursledon” where Elizabeth Vere was said to meet Richard Parker in 1782.

Postcard, photographer unknown.

Richard was therefore brought in for questioning a second time and “after another long and close examination” was again released without charge due to lack of evidence and “with a view to try whether he would betray any guilt by running away.” Some days later, an unnamed person approached the magistrates and swore to having seen Richard & Elizabeth together on the Sunday night near the time and place that she was murdered and claimed to have heard a woman shrieking. Another witness swore to seeing a man on the Wednesday “carrying a body under his arm towards the pond”.

There was no professional police service in the late 18th century. Day-to-day petty misdemeanors would have been dealt with by the parish constables, who were unpaid, elected individuals who dealt with petty crimes, such as drunkenness and brawling, by placing offenders in the local “lock-up” for a spell. It was the responsibility of the local Justice of the Peace (magistrate) to investigate more serious offences. At this time, a typical Justice of the Peace would be a local landowner who would have had no qualifications in law and little or no experience of investigation, dealing mainly with cases of poaching and trespassing. He would refer the most serious crimes to the Quarter Sessions or the Assizes, where they would be tried before a qualified judge. Although the Bow Street Runners, a volunteer group operating out of London, were established c.1748, they were little more than organised thief-takers or bounty hunters, not investigators and the landmarks in professional policing were yet to come. In London, the Metropolitan Police were established under Robert Peel in 1829 (hence the nicknames Bobbies and Peelers) and in Hampshire, the Winchester Police force was formed in 1832, followed in 1835 by Borough Police forces in Andover, Basingstoke, Lymington, Portsmouth & Southampton – some fifty years after the murder of poor Elizabeth Vere.

Richard Parker was arrested for a third time and on Friday 7th March 1783 stood trial at Hampshire Assizes, where he was acquitted. The report of his acquittal was a bald statement of fact and did not cite any grounds for it. Richard remained in the local area and never married. He died at the age of 54 and was buried at St. Mary Extra Cemetery, half a mile along the road from Miller's Pond.

Two observations can be made about this case:

1. Richard Parker was arrested and questioned three times; they were either convinced of his guilt but unable to prove it or they had no other suspect and concentrated on him simply because he was her boyfriend.
2. He underwent a "long and close examination". This suggests he was probably beaten, but he never confessed. Either he was innocent or he was tough and holding out – after all, a beating, however severe, is better than a hanging.

The newspaper report also raises more questions than it answers:

1. Who was the young woman from West End who accompanied Elizabeth Vere? And why would she persuade a girl whom she said was afraid of her boyfriend to go and meet him?
2. Elizabeth's body was found in the pond after allegedly being hidden in a barley field. Yet the unnamed witness claiming to have seen a man carrying a body towards the pond does not appear to have mentioned seeing him extracting the body from a barley field. From where had this information originated?
3. Why would Elizabeth's murderer leave her body under straw and branches in a field for 3 days before dumping her in Miller's Pond?
4. What were the "indications of guilt" displayed by Richard Parker at Elizabeth's funeral, which lead to his second arrest?
5. Who was the "person" who applied to the magistrate and swore to seeing Richard Parker with Elizabeth Vere – and why did he or she wait until after Richard had been arrested and released twice?
6. Who was the witness who saw a man carrying a body under his arm? Did he or she positively identify Richard Parker as that man? Was it the same witness? Again, why did this witness wait until after Richard had been arrested and released twice? Would it not be more natural to raise the hue and cry at the time?
7. On what grounds was Richard Parker acquitted? Scottish law would have allowed for a verdict of "not proven", enabling a retrial if more evidence were forthcoming, but under English law at that time, lack of evidence would result in acquittal without the possibility of retrial. It does not necessarily indicate innocence.

Was Richard Parker a murderer? If Richard Parker did not kill Elizabeth Vere, who did? Unfortunately, I have been unable to find any official records of the case at Hampshire Archives with which to attempt an answer to any of these questions. How many of the unanswered questions are due to poor policing and how many to poor reporting by the newspaper?

But, of course, the ultimate question is: who was Elizabeth Vere? An entry in South Stoneham burial register shows the burial of Elizabeth Vear [sic] on 15th September 1782. Richard Parker was 22 years old at the time of the murder, so we can reasonably assume that his sweetheart was of a similar age or perhaps younger. The South Stoneham baptism register shows three possibilities: 2nd February 1758 - Elizabeth VEAR, daughter of Isaac & Christian, who would have been age 24 at the time of the murder.

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4th December 1761 - Elizabeth VEAR, daughter of Thos. & Ann would have been age 21 at the time of the murder.

31st December 1765 - Elizabeth VEAR, daughter of John & Elizabeth, would have been 17 years old at the time of the murder.

Of course, Elizabeth may not have been born or baptised in the area, but moved here from elsewhere ... the mystery remains.

West End Parish Councillors c.1955

Barry Topp kindly loaned the museum this photograph of the West End Parish Councillors taken some time in the 1950s. He has been able to name some of the individuals for us. We would be grateful if anyone is able to name any of the others, please contact the editor or a member of the museum team.



Back row, left to right:

Mr Brown? – unknown – Bert Misselbrook – Ted Topp – Charles Collins – Mr Black – unknown – unknown.

Front row, left to right:

Mr Haines - Miss Winifred Moody – Major Paine? – Mrs Bamber – Doctor Bamber.

Barry tells us that Mrs Brown may have been the Parish Clerk, Major Paine may have been the Chairman and Dr & Mrs Brown were the parents of Dr Claude Bamber.

The First Municipal Bus Operator – Part One

By Ashley MacFarlane - Watt

We take our bus services for granted and they form an integral part of our busy lives, whether we use them for shopping, visits to friends, hospital visits, going to work or school, or longer trips to the countryside, or to the sea. Open top bus tours are an integral part of sightseeing experiences in many towns, cities and seaside resorts. It is easy then to forget that after some one hundred and twenty-five years of municipal bus operations and country services that the beginning of bus operations was fraught with difficulties with badly maintained roads and poor infrastructure as well as coping with the demands and challenges of a new technology, the internal combustion engine.

There are two claimants for the prestige of being the First Municipal Bus Operator. Both are justified and legitimate in their claims but for different reasons. It is acknowledged that Eastbourne was the first municipality to operate bus services continually, commencing in 1903 and running uninterrupted up to the present day. Eastbourne, unlike many other towns and cities at the beginning of the twentieth century, did not operate a tramway. However, Southampton can rightly claim to being the very first municipality to operate a bus service, commencing operations in 1901, but, unlike Eastbourne, the service was short lived, fraught with difficulties and failed to fulfil the high expectations and optimism expected of it.

Southampton Corporation Tramways became very interested in the potential of motor buses at a very early stage of its operations. Electric tramways services had commenced on 22nd January 1900 with a service between Prospect place (The Junction) and Shirley. A major problem in the development of a successful and homogeneous transport in Southampton was the difficulty of crossing the River Itchen. The main bridges at Northam and Cobden, as well as the Floating Bridge between Woolston and Southampton were owned and controlled by various private bridge and road companies, who also controlled the adjacent toll roads. The hilly topography of the eastern suburbs of Woolston, Bitterne, Bitterne Park, Sholing and Midanbury was in marked contrast to the flatness of Southampton and its suburbs. The result was that Corporation transport only reached the eastern suburbs as the tolls were abolished. Cobden Bridge was purchased by the Corporation at an early date and subsequently rebuilt. Northam Bridge was similarly acquired on 25th March 1929 for £79,238 and freed from tolls on 16th May 1929. And finally, that vital link, the Floating Bridge was purchased on 29th September 1934 and in the following years played a prominent part in the development of bus services as it formed an essential link in many circular routes and, due to its high capacity, was extremely busy throughout the day.

In 1896, the Southampton Electric Light and Power Company was purchased by the Corporation, thus guaranteeing the provision of electric power in the town. This was followed by the compulsory purchase of the Southampton Tramway Company on 30th June 1898. Because of the aforementioned difficulties, only one line of the electric tramway crossed the River Itchen and provided a service from Portswood to Bitterne Park Triangle commencing at the end of August 1902, replacing a similar horse-bus route. It was extended to Bullar Road in July 1923 providing access to Bitterne Station.

Various horse-bus services were operated by the Corporation with a depot established at Highfield. As the tramway system was electrified and expanded, existing horse tram and horse-bus services were either replaced by the new electric tramway or simply abandoned. By the end of 1902 all the horses and omnibuses owned by the corporation had been sold.

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It is, then, surprising in view of the expanding and developing electric tramway that in May 1900, the advantages of using motor buses was beginning to become apparent. It was realised that the motor bus provided a flexibility that could be used to provide feeder services to the expanding tramway as well as reaching areas that lay beyond the tramway and could be used for their own independent routes. Those routes that showed significant large passenger numbers could be eventually incorporated into the tramway system. This was very imaginary and forward thinking.

In either May or June 1900, a deputation visited Bournemouth to inspect vehicles already in experimental use there. Suitably impressed by what they had seen, the members of the deputation felt that their initial enthusiasm for motor buses had been confirmed and vindicated. June was spent in further discussions and investigations into the feasibility of using buses for feeder services to the tramway or to inaugurate new routes. On June 28th 1900, a letter was received from the Motor Manufacturing Company offering the Corporation the loan of a motor bus for a trial period during the period 1st August - 8th August. This offer was duly accepted. A Granville 11 seat motor wagonette was supplied for the trial by the Motor Manufacturing Company. The trial was highly successful with the vehicle completing 97 journeys and covering 344 miles. Passenger numbers were an impressive 2546 with receipts recorded at £11.97 (£11. 19. 5d in real money!)

With the success of the trial, Southampton Corporation Tramways invited tenders for the provision of motor buses to carry twelve passengers. Nine tenders were submitted and reflected the variety and diversity of manufacturers and vehicles available during the early 1900s. They make for interesting reading:

Daimler Motor Company - to seat 12	£490
Motor Manufacturing Company - to seat 12 plus driver	£565
Motor Manufacturing Company - to seat 11	£468
T. Coulthard & Company	£600
Julius Harvey - STEAM	£650
Wolverhampton Cycle and Steam Company - STEAM	£355
Simson and Bibby - STEAM	£600
Swansea Motor Omnibus Co. - two almost new Daimler wagonettes	£300 each
Coventry Motor Omnibus Company - Almost new Daimler	£500

With such a diverse range of vehicles and tenders, considerable discussion inevitably ensued to consider the most suitable vehicle. The tender offered by the Daimler Motor Company appeared to be the most suitable. A small deputation visited the Daimler factory and were very impressed by the workshops and organisation of the company. They then visited Nottingham to see similar vehicles at work and spoke to the Chief Constable, who considered them to be excellent and had little impact on the roads. As a result of this visit to the Daimler Company, three vehicles were ordered, two to be used in service and one kept in reserve to cover for breakdowns and servicing. A fitter was spearheaded to the Daimler motor Company for one month to learn the rudiments of how to drive the vehicle and to maintain it in good running order. The three vehicles were to be garaged at the Corporation Tramways Highfield Depot. In due course, the first vehicle was duly delivered and inaugurated the first motor bus service from the Clock Tower to Northam on 5th August 1901. (The Clock Tower now stands at Bitterne Park Triangle. Originally, it stood approximately at the junction where New Road crosses Above Bar and for many years was the focal point for Southampton Corporation bus services). Not only was the inauguration of this bus service of importance to Southampton, but historically makes Southampton the FIRST MUNICIPAL BUS OPERATOR!

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With such high hopes and aspirations for the new bus service, in practice the service became a disaster and a great disappointment. In service, the Daimler proved to be extremely erratic and frequently broke down. Such were the constant problems and breakdowns with the bus, the Town Clerk sent a strongly worded telegram to the Daimler Motor Company stating that the vehicle they had supplied was totally unreliable. He stated that the vehicle would be withdrawn from service unless a representative from the firm came, free of charge, to inspect and overhaul the vehicle. Furthermore, he requested that a driver should be supplied to operate the vehicle for a month. The Town Clerk continued to state that as the Corporation had incurred a deficit because of the erratic and unreliable behaviour of the vehicle, then the other two buses on order would not be accepted until the present vehicle had proved its reliability.

Needless to say, the Daimler Motor Company were extremely annoyed and displeased to receive this telegram but agreed to send a representative to inspect the vehicle. When the representative arrived, he took the motor vehicle out for a test run whereupon it promptly broke down again! He closely inspected the vehicle and found the bearings were badly damaged. The representative from Daimler concluded that the fault lay neither with company or the vehicle but in the way it had been badly maintained. He claimed that the fitter designated to look after the vehicle had shown a demonstrably lack of capability. Perhaps garaging and maintaining a motor vehicle in a garage used by horses and horse-buses at Highfield was perhaps not the ideal location or facility. The Corporation vehemently denied the accusations made by Daimler. Eventually a compromise was reached between Daimler and the Corporation whereby the Daimler Motor Company agreed to overhaul and repair the vehicle. This work was undertaken during the latter half of November.

Back in service again on Tuesday 26th November, the high hopes for an improved reliability of the vehicle were dashed as it broke down completely the following Thursday. It was repaired and returned to service only to shed the left rear tyre during the course of travelling along Northam Road. The saga of misfortunes and breakdowns continued, leading to the inevitable decision to withdraw the service on 20th December 1901. The first municipal bus service had been in operation for less than five months. It was a huge disappointment to the Corporation who had such high hopes and aspirations for the bus service. But it was not to be.

Again, Daimler sent their manager to Southampton to inspect the vehicle. Again, he was scathing of the Corporation for their poor facilities and inadequate and inept maintenance. This was strongly refuted and rebutted by the Corporation. This led to a protracted and bitter argument between the Corporation and Daimler, which lasted for many months. Accusations and counter accusations continue to be made. Eventually, the Corporation stated that they wished to return the vehicle to the manufacturer and they demanded Daimler to sell the other two buses on order. This acrimonious argument continued until September 1902, when an agreement was eventually reached between the two parties. Daimler agreed to take back the offending vehicle and to sell the other two vehicles that had been ordered. They paid £620.19. 1d to the Corporation by way of settlement. Since that time, no buses manufactured by Daimler have ever been purchased by the Corporation.

Bitterly disappointed, chastened and with their high expectations so disastrously dashed, Southampton Corporation Tramways decided that the motor bus had shown itself to be not sufficiently developed to operate a reliable and viable bus services. It was not until December 1910, nine years later, that a service was again provided to Northam, but this time as an extension to the tramway system using two PAYE single deck trams Nos. 50 and 51.

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In view of the great disappointment of the first bus service, it was some twelve years until the Tramways Manager produced a report on 19th June 1914 considering their possible reintroduction of motor buses. This detailed report considered the advantages and feasibility of using motor buses but also considered the merits of various other modes of transport including trolley buses, steam buses, petrol – electric buses, electric accumulator buses as well as petrol buses. He was particularly impressed with trolley buses which could utilise much of the existing tramway. However, he recognised the fact that so many roads were unsuitable for their use and that once installed trolleybuses would be as inflexible as the tramway system. Parliamentary powers to secure the operation of trolleybuses was prohibitively expensive.

Part Two to be continued in Summer Issue.

On this Day, 28th March: Raphael was born as Raffaello Sanzio at Urbina, Italy **in 1483**. The Renaissance artist died aged 37 in 1520.

FORTHCOMING LOCAL EVENTS

All information is correct at time of publication. Please contact event organisers for up-to-date information.

'Town & Country: A Journey Through the Seasons' Art Exhibition, Mottisfont 8th Feb – 12th April
“Over 60 pieces are on display, in watercolour and oil, from berry-laden field hedgerows, snow-covered fields and blossom-covered trees to games of village cricket in the heat of summer and the vivid greens of tree canopies brightening London’s squares and waterways.”
NORMAL ADMISSION TIMES & PRICES APPLY.

Bees! Exhibition, William Museum, Basingstoke 7th March-21st June FREE

“From buzzing gardens to golden honey, bees connect us to the natural world in remarkable ways. This exhibition explores their world, how they live, work and communicate, sometimes even through dance. At the heart of the story is local man Charles Butler of Wootton St Lawrence - a 17th-century vicar, musician and pioneering observer of bees. His groundbreaking 1623 book *The Feminine Monarchie* transformed beekeeping in England. You’ll also be able to step inside a giant hive, learn about traditional and modern beekeeping, and take part in hands-on activities and bee-themed games.”

NORMAL ADMISSION TIMES APPLY.

Wessex Sinfonietta at Royal Victoria Hospital, Netley 22nd March 3 p.m. Doors open 2.30.p.m.



A one-hour concert with no interval.

Ravel – Pavane pour une infante défunte

Faure – Pelléas et Mélisande

Bizet – Symphony in C.

Conducted by Daniel Hogan.

ADULTS £15. Aged 18 and under £1. FREE PARKING

BBC Gardener's World Spring Fair at Beaulieu 1st May – 3rd May 9.30 a.m. - 5 p.m.

“Kick off your gardening year in style by joining us for this much-loved show, filled with an abundance of gardening expertise, inspiration and shopping. Soak up seasonal advice with multiple drop-in stages, grow what you know with hands-on workshops and informative garden tours and explore the beautiful grounds of Beaulieu during your visit. Plus, with over 100 exhibitors and over 30 specialist nurseries, bring the ideas already taking root to life with plenty of plants and kit to take home. This event includes admission to all the Beaulieu attractions - including The National Motor Museum!”

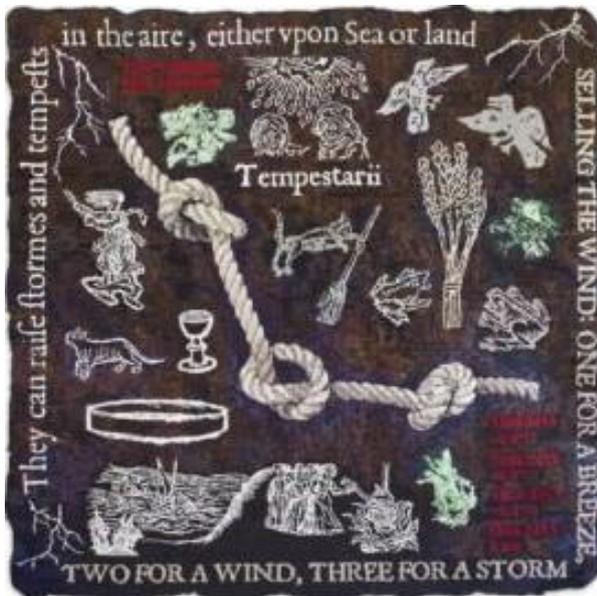
NORMAL ADMISSION TIMES & PRICES APPLY.

Hamble Spring Food Festival 2nd May 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.

“Join us for a special Hampshire Farmers' Markets from 10am to 3pm! Enjoy a delightful array of fresh local produce and artisan stalls. Don't miss 'The Henry's' acoustic harmonies from 11am to 2pm, and let the kids get their faces painted by 'Glittering the South.' There will be plenty of delicious freshly cooked food and drinks to satisfy your cravings, whether you want to grab something on the go or take it home. It's going to be a fun-filled day for everyone!”

Don't miss out! There is also a Harvest Food Festival on 3rd October.

Witch / Craft Exhibition, St. Barbe Museum Lymington 23rd May – 4th July



“Two complementary exhibitions explore changing attitudes to witches and witchcraft from the 17th century to today. Anne Jackson's powerful tapestries draw on trial records, historic imagery and symbolism to reflect on persecution, prejudice and the stories of the last women hanged for witchcraft in England. Alongside this, Sara Hannant presents collaborative photographic portraits of modern witches. Working with covens in the New Forest and London, her images reveal how contemporary practitioners define their identity, live their beliefs, and contribute to modern culture.”

NORMAL ADMISSION TIMES & PRICES APPLY.

<https://www.stbarbe-museum.org.uk/>

The Big Eat Festival at Royal Victoria Country Park 23rd May – 25th May

“The Big Eat is returning to Royal Victoria Country Park for the fourth consecutive year after securing headline sponsorship from family owned and award-winning motor group Snows Toyota for the second year. The free-to-attend festival is a celebration of local food and talent with all the profits being donated to local food banks. There will be live music and entertainment for all ages to enjoy - including a silent disco, a petting zoo and a dog show. At The Big Eat 2026, street food vendors from across Hampshire and beyond will be battling it out for the coveted Hampshire Street Food Awards! With a panel of expert judges and public votes, vendors will compete for prestigious titles like Best Burger, Best Vegan, Best Pizza, and many more. This festival is about showcasing the incredible talent and creativity within the local street food scene. So, if you're a foodie, you won't want to miss out on tasting the best dishes while supporting local businesses.”

FREE ENTRY, PARKING CHARGES APPLY

WEST END LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Unless stated otherwise, all events take place at West End Parish Centre, Chapel Road SO30 3FE and begin at 7.30 p.m.

Members free. Visitors welcome (£3 per person per meeting, including tea/coffee).

Programme of Talks 2026

January	NO MEETING
Wed. 4 th February	Royal Victoria Hospital and the development of Netley Abbey village by Ursula Pearce
Wed. 4 th March	The pleasure of a Paddle Steamer by Simon Gomm
Wed. 1 st April	A.G.M. followed by A Game of Thrones by Dr Cheryl Butler
Wed. 6 th May	The Itchen Navigation Part 1 by Ashley MacFarlane Watt
Wed. 3 rd June	The Flying Scotsman, a living legend by Stephen Hoadley
Wed. 3 rd July	Southampton's Maison Dieu (Hospital of Gods House) by Geoff Watts
Wed. 5 th August	SOCIAL EVENING <u>AT MUSEUM</u> with raffle and refreshments
Wed.	PLUTO: Pipeline under the ocean by Rob Eldridge
Wed. 7 th October	Roman Southampton by Andy Skinner
Wed. 4 th November	"Don't delay, Enrol today": The Women's Land Army in Hampshire by John Lander
Wed. 2 nd December	CHRISTMAS SOCIAL EVENING

Articles for Westender

You don't have to be a historian to write for Westender. We would love to hear your memories of growing up in the village.

email: suballard@yahoo.co.uk

or leave hard copies at the museum addressed to Sue Ballard, please.

Closing Date for contributions to Summer issue: 9th May 2026.