

# **The Austin & Wyatt Document Recovery Project Reboot 2023**

## **Bishop's Waltham Society and Bishop's Waltham Museum**

### **Background**

In 1836 Richard Austin started a business in Bishop's Waltham as an Estate Agent (in the original sense of the words – managing large estates). He also became a well-known Auctioneer, holding regular auctions at the Crown Inn in Bishop's Waltham as well as many other places (including pony sales in the New Forest).

He owned the brick works on Coppice Hill and lived in Coppice House. He subsequently bought the town house in the Square where Austin & Wyatt's offices were until 2019.

In early summer 2019, this branch office of Austin & Wyatt (owned for a good number of years by Countrywide Estate Agents) was closed and its staff moved to Southampton.

### **The Documents**

In 2012, the manager at the Bishop's Waltham branch had invited the then chairman of the Town Team to look at the documents stored on the premises. The Town Team chairman, Tony Kippenberger, was also chairman of the Bishop's Waltham Society and he spent a couple of hours looking at old documents dispersed through the building.

It was clear that these were an invaluable resource to know more about the past in Bishop's Waltham (estate maps, property details, rent ledgers, house inventories, tithe books etc.) as well as in wider Hampshire.

However, there seemed to be so many that the Museum at the time (17/2/2013) felt there was too much for them to cope with and so it was suggested that the manager contact Hampshire Record Office (HRO).

In 2014 Sarah Farley of the HRO came to BW to inspect the documents and made a list of what she saw. HRO offered to take them all, but Countrywide decided to keep them after all. They languished on shelves and in attics until they sold up, and then they passed them all to Charters, who now occupy the building.

### **The New Opportunity**

As luck would have it, in June 2019 Alan Inder and Tony Kippenberger were walking through the Square when they spotted a removal van outside Austin & Wyatt's offices which prompted them to ask about the documents. After some toing and froing Charters allowed us to pack up and take away some \*55\* boxes of documents and a 2+ foot high pile of very large scale Ordinance Survey and other maps (around 1500).

The BW Society and museum stores most of the boxes at StorAway, based at The Old Hambledon Racecourse, Wallops Wood, and the maps are in the museum. The HRO have confirmed that they will take almost anything the BW Museum doesn't want to keep.

Over the winter of 2019/2020 we began to sort the documents at the museum. We stopped just before Covid took over and have not had the time to start again - until now!

Our task now is to finish the sorting of the boxes into either "BW", "Local" or "HRO". Once complete, we can pass on the HRO items immediately. The Local items will be sorted into their relevant villages and passed to their history societies or archivists to look at if they are interested. They can choose to keep them or pass them on to HRO. The BW relevant items we will look at again and decide what to keep for the future and what should go to the HRO...

### **NEW SORTING DAYS:**

As members and volunteers (or potential ones) you are invited to come and help us sort the documents at the museum. No experience is necessary. This is not a speedy task, you are

welcome to spend as much time reading the documents as you like – and the newspapers many are wrapped in are fascinating, dating back to the war...

It is dusty/dirty work as the documents were in the attic, and the museum has only minimal heating so please wear layers. If you've not joined us before, we also don't have a toilet so the sessions are only a couple of hours but you are free to come and go as you like.

Working dates are:

Saturday 18 <sup>th</sup> February 2023	2-4pm
Friday 24 <sup>th</sup> February 2023	10-12pm
Monday 13 <sup>th</sup> March 2023	10-12pm
Thursday 30 <sup>th</sup> March 2023	2-4pm

We look forward to seeing you then! If you'd like any further information, don't hesitate to contact: [penny.copeland@btinternet.com](mailto:penny.copeland@btinternet.com)