

SEPTEMBER 2024



AMERSHAM SOCIETY
FOUNDED IN 1956
NEWSLETTER



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Cover photograph: The Physics laboratory at Dr Challoner's Grammar school 1910. © DCGS.

Photograph opposite: 80th Anniversary of the D Day landings commemorated in the Memorial Gardens. Photo: Elena Morgan.

Editorial

Welcome to September's newsletter. We do hope you find the contents interesting; remember if there is anything you'd like us to cover, a subject or local organisation which perhaps fascinates you or a topic the Amersham Society should hone in on, please do let us know.

I must start with an important advanced notice; **with effect from February 2025 our meetings will take place on the last Monday in the month.** This change from the Wednesday has been brought about as a result of unanticipated commitments the Kings Arms now have on the Chapel. **The venue remains the same, as does the time.**

Since the last newsletter Amersham has a new Town Mayor, Dominic Pinkney, and the country has a new government. Amersham chose to return an opposition MP, Sarah Green, to represent us - a luxury we didn't have prior to the 1832 Reform Act (see page 15). And 2024 is the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings, an event the town commemorated with both nostalgia and solemnity in the Memorial Gardens on 2nd June.

Discussions continue into initiatives to revitalise the Market Hall. Its less than easy access and outdated facilities limit the groups which are able to use it. However before progressing, feasibility studies must be undertaken complicated by the fact that it's a Grade II* listed building – it was built in 1682 by Sir William Drake as a gift to the townsfolk. But I can tell you about one local group which has booked to use it on Sunday 15th September, the Chalfonts Beekeepers Society. Its annual honey show always forms part of the Chalfont St Giles show, but sadly it has been cancelled this year due to pollution in the Misbourne (see page 42). The Society wrote to its members: *"we have been fortunate to be able to book this fantastic venue instead"*.

Last September we featured an article celebrating the anniversaries of two local schools, St Mary's and Elangeni who, respectively, had opened their doors 150 and 50 years ago. This year a third local school celebrates an amazing anniversary; it's 400 years since Dr Challoner's school was founded in Market square (see page 16).

A year ago, at the beginning of the 2023–2024 football season Bryan Fisher, the Secretary of Amersham Town Football Club, wrote a brief history of the club. Since then I'm delighted to report that the "Magpies" have enjoyed a particularly successful season.

In an update from Bryan he tells us: *"In the 2023–2024 season Amersham Town won the Cherry Red Records Combined Counties Football League Division 1 title by 17 points and now looks forward to moving up a tier and competing in the Premier Division North* of the Cherry Red Records Combined Counties Football League for season 2024–2025. Further, the club's facilities continue to be improved. We have recently installing LED floodlights following a grant from the Football Foundation".* (*this includes clubs from the western half of Greater London, Middlesex, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire and Surrey).

A quick question for you...which is the newest building in the High Street and what is its connection to a cottage at Bury End and the Friends Meeting House in Whielden St? The answer can be found on page 37.

If you got that one, why are these two stones on The Broadway? See page 31.



Finally, you'll find the last two articles on this year's theme, "Nature in and around Amersham", a survey of the Misbourne (see page 42) and the Flower of Buckinghamshire (see page 27).

The Chairman's Annual Report



Edward Copisarow

I'm pleased to report that the Society remains in good heart with 365 members (up 2 on last year!), another heritage project coming to fruition and a continuing full programme of talks, three newsletters, summer outing and a party.

Heritage Project

The first of two planned information panels about the rarity and ecology of chalk streams and the history of the River Misbourne in Amersham was unveiled to a crowd of 40 members by the Town Mayor, Dominic Pinkney on 13th July on Church Mead.

Many thanks to the team at Amersham Museum, who were a considerable help in providing high-resolution copies of various photographs and specifically photographing some Roman coins found in Amersham for the information panels. Thanks too to Brian Withington and Graham Cook and the trustees of the Dulcie Denison bequest for their financial support for this initiative, to Steve Catanach of Amersham Town Council and his team for their help with the installation and most of all to Peter Borrowes who set the vision and led the project from inception to fruition. A second panel is planned for Barn Meadow in the autumn.

Events

This year's programme of 8 talks included our first in the Large Barn in Amersham-on-the-

Hill. We invited members of Amersham & District Residents Association to join us and it was a great success, so we will be continuing this with one talk at Amersham-on-the-Hill, although we may need the Drake Hall as we were packed to the rafters. Attendance levels continue to rise on all events, with over 70 members on some occasions, thanks to the excellent mix of subject and speakers chosen by our superb Events Committee of Dorothy Symes, Geraldine Marshall-Andrew and Yvonne Suckling. A special thanks are due to Dorothy who retires from the Chair of this committee this year and to Yvonne who has valiantly agreed to receive the baton.

Our summer outing was to Stonor followed by a cruise on the Thames, and in June we were able to hold our Summer Party in the garden of Little Shardeloes thanks to the kind invitation of Sue and Quentin Chases, with catering and drinks again generously donated by Dorothy and Geraldine.

Website and email

Lena Morgan has continued to keep us all up to date on forthcoming events with e-alerts alongside maintaining a website with recent news and ensuring that the links from our pages signpost people to other local organisations.

Newsletter

Along with our talks and website, the newsletter continues to be a major benefit of membership with articles on local events, both historical (for instance the origins of local names) and contemporary (the numerous societies that thrive here).

About half our members live in Amersham-on-the-Hill, so we are featuring more articles relating to, for instance, Chesham Bois ("Bricky Pond" and "Manor House"). And in this issue we link both parts of Amersham with a celebration of Dr Challoner's Grammar school 400th anniversary. Further interest comes from a synopsis of the eight talks given each year.

The broad appeal of the newsletter is not just down to John Catton, the editor, but the small group who support him: regular contributors such as Briony Hudson, Director at Amersham Museum, Lena Morgan, proof reader and supplier of many of the photographs, the members who kindly volunteered to write the synopses of our talks and outings, and most importantly Danny Robins, our imaginative graphic designer.

Community Liaison

David Cash, who joined our committee last year managed to get off to a good start with his brief to involve more people from Amersham-on-the-Hill. We proposed the Amersham & Villages Community Board volunteering day and David attended the meetings of the organising committee as well as staffing our stand on the day. He is also engaging with the Amersham U3A group and helped to make the Barn Hall evening a great success.

Planning

Our thanks must also go to Carol Chesney who will be retiring from her role as our Planning Officer as soon as we can find a replacement. We had further representations to make on The Maltings development in response to a revised application, and Carol put in a great deal of time on the planning for the new Aldi store at the London end of the Old Town. We were partially successful in persuading the Council's planning committee of the value of traditional building materials: the design which was eventually accepted is brick at ground floor level but sadly rendered thereafter to a flat roof, whereas we should have preferred a more vernacular style with a pitched roof as an enhancement to the gateway of the Old Town. Our success in this endeavour was in no small part due to John Catton who was invited to speak to the Planning Committee when they met in High Wycombe.

And Finally...

..... the backbone of our organisation remains unchanged: Geraldine continues to organise our Committee meetings, sets our agenda and drafts the minutes, treasurer John Morgan continues to keep our books, and deals with the bank, our insurers and the Charity Commission and Peter Borrows, our Membership Secretary, has gently persuaded us so that we now have half of our membership subscriptions paid by direct debit. This will prove a great boon as we have finally reach the point where we need to review our subscriptions to make sure we can continue to offer members the newsletter, events and community activity that we all enjoy so much.

Annual General Meeting

The Society's Annual General Meeting will be held in the Kings Chapel on Wednesday 30th October 2024 at 8.00pm.

(To be preceded by a glass of wine or soft drink at 7.30).

AGENDA

- 1 Apologies for absence.
- 2 Minutes of the 2023 Annual General Meeting and business arising.
- 3 Chairman's Annual Report.
- 4 Honorary Treasurer's Report and Statement of Accounts.
- 5 Annual Subscription: The committee recommends that the subscription should be increased to £17.00 for individuals and £25.00 for double membership, to take effect on the 1st of January 2025. The members are asked to approve.
- 6 Election of Committee Members and Officers.**
- 7 Any other business.

The Annual General Meeting will be followed by:-

- Discussion of topics raised by members.
- TALK: '**The Chapter Two Community Bookshop.**'
This talk will be given by Mark Jackson-Hancock who is the manager. All profits from the shop go to support the St Francis Hospice.

- ** Election of Committee Members and Officers.
Nominations should be sent by 23rd October to the Hon Secretary at 162 High Street, Amersham, HP7 0EG.



East London after the blitz of WWII

© Wikimedia Commons

Bagels and Bacon

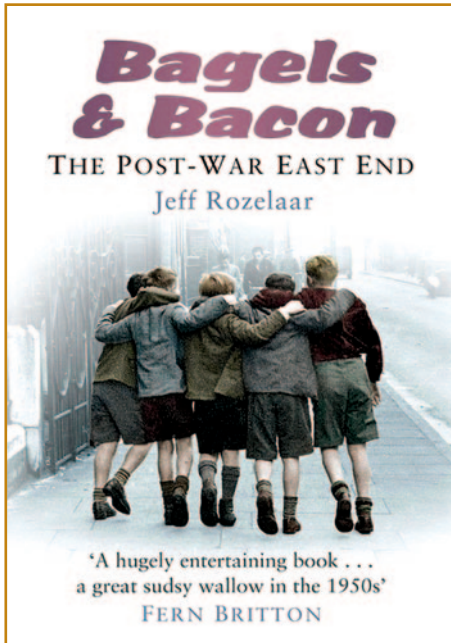
In May we were delighted to welcome Jeff Rozelaar and hear his story about growing up in the East End of London during the period immediately after the Second World War. Jeff was born into a Jewish family and his talk was based on his autobiography *“Bagels and Bacon”*, published in 2011.

Once his audience had settled Jeff took up his perch on a high stool and in a mostly calm voice he proceeded to take us back in time with a fascinating account of day to day life immediately after the war in the cockney Jewish area of London - on the border of the East End and the City of London - where he grew up. Jeff did not illustrate his talk but occasionally, when he wanted to emphasise or clarify a point, he jumped down from his stool, strode about his stage and raised his voice

Jeff's talk was full of vivid descriptions of interesting and colourful people with strong personalities who were part of his life. He told us about close family members: his father Henry, who after the war joined the Rag Trade, his mother Nancy, who had volunteered as a bus conductor during the war braving air raids, his younger sister, Bernice and various aunts and uncles who lived nearby. Jeff also included many short descriptions of incidents that had happened in this vibrant area of London, and which left a lasting impression.

The title of Jeff's book comes from the distinctive aromas of local cooking; on one side of the road there was a bakery with its familiar and enticing smell of bagels, while on the other side there was the smell of fried bacon. This was definitely a multicultural community. Young Jeff's life was simple, but with a freedom; neighbourhood streets with much of the destruction from the blitz still evident, became a playground for Jeff and his friends. They could wander off to the Tower of London to see the guns from Sebastopol or watch the boats bringing in exotic fruits, or play on the shingle beach along the Thames. The British Library at St Pancras was not far away. The Anglo-Jewish writer, Lionel Bart, lived nearby.

Jeff told us about the many different experiences and characters that had been part of his early life. He recalled an incident with a No 78 bus when it approached Tower Bridge and the bridge started to open. The driver had somehow missed the warning signal, but without hesitation he accelerated hard and the bus was



able to fly over the widening gap. He also told us about a comment made by an American tourist who wondered why William the Conqueror had not built the Tower of London nearer the subway! Jeff's parents both had jobs and were considered to be the "deserving poor". He remembered how every day he was given a spoonful of Virol, a toffee like substance given to children as a tonic. Jeff went to a Hebrew School for six to seven years so that he could study the scriptures for his Bar Mitzva ceremony.

In 1953 his parents bought a large TV on which he remembered watching films about Pearl Harbour and the

sinking of the Titanic. He spoke about his teachers having little control of the boys; it was the time of "teddy boy" haircuts and drainpipe trousers. However his Head Teacher, Mr Rhodes Boyson, turned the school around from one of poor performance to a successful school. Mr Boyson was later knighted and became Minister for Education in Mrs Thatcher's government. Jeff remembered the time when Russia had put intercontinental missiles on Cuba and the world feared another (nuclear) World War.

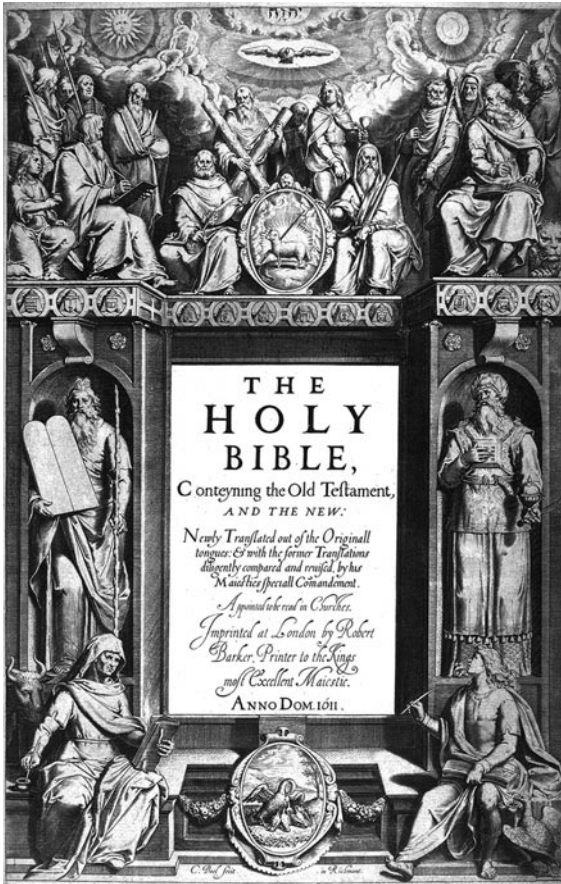
Jeff went to Carmel College, which educated the sons of tradesmen such as carpenters and bookies and enabled them to go to university, which he regarded as a privilege and told us that going to university had changed his life.

In conclusion Jeff told us that he had enjoyed many pursuits that had enriched his life, in particular reading Dickens and Shakespeare and listening to classical music such as Pomp and Circumstance; he also admired the cockney spirit and the British sense of humour.

Dorothy Symes

The Bible Translation

Part Two



© Wikimedia Commons

King James' Bible, 1611, shows the Twelve Apostles at the top. Moses and Aaron flank the central text.

In his talk in February 2021 David Morgan related the world-wide historical twists and turns up to the death of John Wycliffe (1384) of efforts to have an English language version of the bible. He returned in April 2024 to complete the story, one full of religious tensions, ending up with the universally recognised King James Bible of 1611.

The article below endeavours to provide a synopsis, as recollected by an audience participant, of the second talk (with grateful thanks to David Morgan and apologies for the inclusion of any inadvertent extraneous material).

For anyone under the illusion that the story of how the Bible came into existence might be a dry and dusty tale for crusty old academics, April's talk by David Morgan would have been a revelation.

His second lecture started with the bloody collapse of the Byzantine capital of Constantinople with the invasion of the Turks and ended a century and a half later in 1611 with the production of what we refer to now as the King James Bible.

To recap on Part One, the Bible's earliest beginnings had been recorded by the Israelites with their writings forming the basis of the Old Testament. Here lay the story of God's astonishing decision to choose one man and his descendants to become his chosen people and be shining examples to the rest of the world. His blessings and their response, the good and the toe curling bad, were recorded in these writings for all to read.

With the coming of Jesus, the long awaited Messiah, and his rejection by his chosen people for being the wrong sort of Messiah, a new chapter in this relationship started and the message of God's forgiveness and love was passed onto non-Jews by Jesus's followers, originally themselves fellow Jews but later from other backgrounds. These recollections and early preachings were eventually written down and became the basis of the New Testament with the church now formally established

in Rome, the home of its hitherto persecutor.

There was a problem though. Greek was the lingua franca of the early church but now Latin was the Roman Empire's common tongue so in 382 Pope Damasus instructed his secretary the scholar St Jerome to compile the gospels in Latin. This became known as the Vulgate Bible (Latin vulg re to make common i.e. accessible/popular and not to be confused with our current usage of "vulgar") and this remained the main bible in use for the next 1,000 years.

As the Roman Empire, and in its wings, Christianity, grew the latter became polarised between the Catholic Church in Rome and the Eastern Orthodox Church in Constantinople. A series of ecclesiastical differences and theological disputes between the Greek East and Latin West preceded the formal split that occurred in 1054 (though the Roman Empire itself split in 395).

Now, even though the Vulgate had itself initially been translated from several languages, as the church grew in size and authority it became more formalised and fixed in its ways and began to resist the further dissemination of the bible into local tongues.



© St John's College Cambridge

The Great Bible 1539 (St John's version)

There were a number of reasons. Firstly Latin was the common language of the Western Church and of the educated classes right across Europe. Secondly the spelling and meaning of its words had by now been well established unlike English, which was in a constant state of flux. Thirdly the rapid militant expansion of Islam throughout Asia Minor and around the Mediterranean provoked a defensive reaction. And also, sadly, the act of

restricting accessibility increased the power of the establishment, marking a divide between ruled and rulers.

By the beginning of the middle ages with the growing prosperity in Europe and the size of the educated middle classes there was a growing desire among the population, particularly in the German states, Switzerland and England, to read it in their own languages and various unofficial translations were made.

In England in 1382 John Wycliffe and his followers translated it from Latin into Middle English. This was welcomed by the populace but met opposition from the Catholic (meaning universal) Church and, after his death, Wycliffe was excommunicated and his body exhumed and burnt.

On the Continent similar reprisals happened. In 1415 Jan Hus and others in Prague produced Scriptures in Hungarian and Bohemian (Czech). Hus was executed in short order.

In the meantime with the fall of Constantinople and its capture by the Turks in 1453 many of its scholars fled to Rome, Paris and elsewhere, bringing with them many of the documents, originally written in Hebrew and Greek. This windfall potentially offered greater insights into the current bible's accuracy and interpretation.

So a confluence of factors, fresh insights into the texts, the means of mass dissemination (particularly the invention of Gutenberg's printing press in the 1440s) and the demand for personal access, were all happening at around the same time.

Additionally, corrupt practices such as the church's selling of indulgences for the forgiveness of sins and the multiplicity of dubious holy relics encouraging a sort of early tourist trade highlighted church venality and reduced respect for its authority, stoking popular demand for an accessible bible.

Erasmus of Rotterdam produced an edition of the Greek text of the New Testament in 1516 and in England Myles Coverdale had completed (1535) the translation of Tyndale's earlier Middle English version (1525) and presented it to Henry VIII.



Miles Coverdale



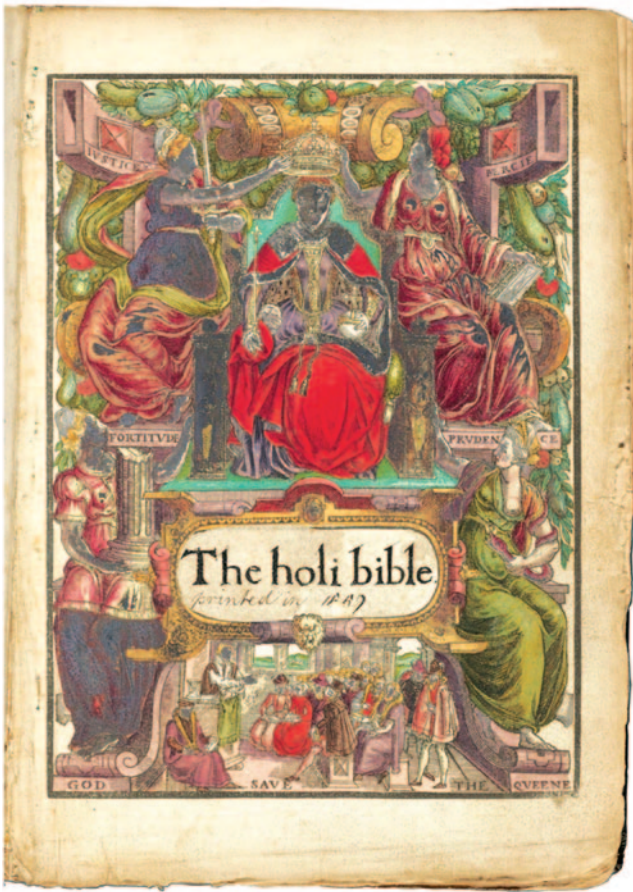
William Tyndale

Things were hotting up. Tyndale was persecuted and fled to the Continent but was finally captured and strangled by the Holy Roman Emperor's troops in 1536.

When the Catholic priest Martin Luther declared that God's forgiveness was through faith and not through such money grabbing practices the conflict really sparked into flame.

Also in England Henry VIII was having second thoughts about his allegiance to Rome being miffed by their refusal to grant his divorce and in 1534 decided to renounce papal authority, cut out the middleman and proclaim himself head of the English church, making the bible in English required reading in churches throughout the land.

The Holi Bible, 1569
(also known as
The Bishops' Bible)



Sadly this occurred too late for many unfortunates. Our own Amer-sham Martyrs Memorial records the sad fate of the local victims who were burnt at the stake between 1506 and 1532; inflammatory literature indeed.

After Henry's death there followed a period of turbulence with Catholics and Protestant claimants to the throne alternating in power, usually accompanied by further burnings at the stake until with the end of the Tudor dynasty, James VI of Scotland, a Protestant, was offered the throne becoming James I of England in 1603.

Aware of significant religious tensions between Catholics and Protestants he commissioned a conference in 1604 at Hampton Court where it was suggested that a revision of the bible was required as subsequent editions had strayed from the original text; hardly surprising given the passage of time and multiple clerical

copying of text by hand pre-Gutenberg.

The task of translation was undertaken by 47 scholars, although 54 were originally approved. All were members of the Church of England and all but one were clergy. The scholars worked in six committees, two based in each of the University of Oxford, the University of Cambridge, and Westminster, finally completing the work in 1611.

In the generally dismal history of committee work this must stand out as a truly remarkable achievement.

David Flett

From Rotten Borough to Freedom of Choice

In July we had an earlier than anticipated general election, returning one Member of Parliament in the constituency of Chesham and Amersham, with its recently revised boundaries. It wasn't always thus, with smaller constituencies and a not so open and equitable voting system. Peter Schweiger explains how things worked prior to the 1832 Reform Act.

Amersham used to have two Members of Parliament (as did Wendover). For two centuries before the 1832 Reform Act, it was (male) members of the Drake family, living at Shardeloes, who were always Amersham's MPs – father and son and immediately before the Reform Act two brothers, Thomas and William Tyrwhitt Drake.

The family did this by buying up as many of the houses on the south side of the High Street as they could and ensuring that they were occupied by people who worked for them. Those houses had Burgage Plots, long strips of land that the resident could use to produce food for themselves. They also, crucially, had the right to vote. As the elections were held in known places, on one day, by a show of hands, it was possible to know who had voted for whom. Those who valued their jobs, voted for their masters. At one time there were only about 170 electors and they were given the day off and plenty to drink. The various hostelrys around Amersham were where the elections were held with large amounts of money being spent in them. In the last election before

the Reform Act 1832, it totalled in today's money, about fifty thousand pounds.

There had been MPs for Amersham in the thirteen hundreds but they lapsed and were only reintroduced in 1625. At that time there were many non-conformists in Amersham and the Drakes were unable to control their votes resulting in their sometimes losing the seats. That was why they built more houses between the relatively few along the High Street. They had been detached and then many parts became terraces. They also, in the late eighteenth century, built brick facades over the timber framed fronts to make Amersham look more modern.

Of course before and after the 1832 Reform Act only men over a certain age had a vote. Gradually women became emancipated and the whole adult population had a chance to vote for those whose policies attracted them.

On a personal note, I made shoes for Sir Ian Gilmour who was the MP for Chesham and Amersham (1974 – 1992) and one time the Minister for Defence. He was always a very pleasant customer with very long slim aristocratic feet. I did not personally know his successor, Cheryl Gillan, MP for Chesham and Amersham from 1992 until her death in 2021, resulting in a by-election. The surprise winners were the Liberal Democrats who over-turned a huge Tory majority. The non-conformist element had turned the tables!

Peter Schweiger

To the stars through adversity

A short history of the first 400 years of
Dr Challoner's Grammar School



This year marks 400 years since the opening of what is now Dr Challoner's Grammar School (DCGS). What began as a small site in Market Square teaching a limited number of subjects is now one of the country's leading state schools. However, it remains true to the wishes of its founder Dr Robert Chaloner in providing a free education to boys and girls local to Amersham.

Not much is known about the school's founder, Dr Robert Chaloner. Born in the Yorkshire village of Goldsborough near Knaresborough in 1547 his familial name is a traditional craft name for a maker of blankets. He attended Christ Church, Oxford aged 16 and later held the college positions of catechist and censor. He received his Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1576, by which time he would have been old enough to be ordained. He was installed as Rector at St Mary's Church, Amersham in 1576. He was awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinity by Christ Church in 1584 and was later appointed Canon of St George's, Windsor in 1589 where he took on the roles of chanter, auditor and precentor. All of this points to a man with a keen interest in learning which was to be borne out by the charitable bequests made in his Will.

Robert Chaloner died in 1621 and left provision for two schools in his Will. The first, in Knaresborough, was set up in 1616 during his lifetime with a Charter from King James I. Like DCGS, King James' School survives to this day. Robert Chaloner's Will also declares that his decision around the setting up of the school in Amersham was 'as a testimony of my love to them and their children'. However, the problems from his Will only emerged after he died. His Will stipulated that the schools should be funded from the rents payable on lands he had owned in Wavendon in North Buckinghamshire. The farmer (the husband of Robert's niece Ellen) studiously ignored all requests for rent and it was not until 16 September 1624 that the Manor Court at Great Missenden settled the matter in favour of Robert's executors.

The ensuing Church Vestry meeting in the Church House in Amersham's Market Square saw that building formally declared to be the home of the new school and the minute declares it was to be: for ever thereafter to be called the Free School of Robert Challoner, Doctor of Divinity, late Rector of the Parish Church of Amersham in the County of Bucks.' It is likely that the minute-taker's spelling mistake of putting two l's in Robert's surname is from where the spelling we know of Challoner comes from today.

The school was to stay in its home on Market Square until 1905. Boys

generally joined the school at the age of 7 or 8 and stayed until the age of 15 or 16 whereupon some would be enrolled in university. The curriculum was focussed on Latin, religion and maths although there was the occasional games period to punctuate the rote-learning. The school was both day and boarding and the appointment of the Revd W.H. Williams who served as Headmaster from 1862-1880 put the school on the way to recovery, although it continued to ebb and flow. Numbers in the school waxed and waned and at one point in the nineteenth century, the school went down to just one pupil and was lucky to survive.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the school had expanded to some 40 pupils as this illustration from 1895 shows. It had done well to survive as the endowment for the school had long since dried up and successive teachers had all complained about the conditions in which they had been forced to work. It was only really at the start of the twentieth century that the school was put onto a more secure footing which was shaped by the inspirational Headmaster Ernest Wainwright whose tenure was between 1897 and 1908.

Mr Wainwright was the first non-clergy leader of the school and his decade in charge was decisive in shaping the school today. He oversaw the creation of a science laboratory thanks to a grant from the Department of Science and Art and the school began to grow once again.



The head teacher, one master and forty pupils in this 1895 picture

Numbers soon dictated that the current building was no longer suitable and a solution was sought. Taking decisive action, he wrote to the County Education Committee who agreed to provide the sum of £1,500 for a new school, providing this could be matched and that the school became co-educational. A plot of land was offered by William Tyrwhitt-Drake which cost £775. The final sale of Robert Chaloner's lands together with grants from Amersham Rural District Council helped to secure the site, although funding for the buildings remained an issue. After much to-ing and fro-ing with the Council, they agreed to provide further funding enabling the building of the school we have today.

The new school opened in September 1905 and was originally designed to hold 90 students. The range of subjects on offer began to resemble the modern curriculum we see today and included Mathematics, English, History,

Geography, Science and French along with Domestic Economy for the girls and Manual Instruction for the boys. There was an entrance examination and parents were encouraged to allow their offspring to stay in school long enough to sit Cambridge Local Examinations. The school was also fee-paying with a fee of £3 in 1906 payable to the clerk to the Governors.

The school started its tradition of sport with football and cricket for boys and tennis and hockey for girls. The first school magazine *The Eagle* was published in 1906 noted various school clubs including the Rifle club which used the main school corridor as its range; health and safety concerns were not what they are now in those days.

Over the ensuing decades the school continued to grow, with the first building expansion taking place in 1910, just five years after the initial opening. Just after these buildings were opened, World War I

Dr. Challoner's High School, circa 1913



© Dr. Challoner's Girls School

broke out and for possibly the first time the school was used by the community with the Hall being used as a base for entertaining troops billeted to Amersham. Students grew potatoes and vegetables to assist in the war efforts, whilst the school took in seven Belgian refugees. Eleven former students and one member of staff were killed in action; their names remembered forever on the school's war memorial.

By the end of the War, the school had grown to some 150 students, but the buildings continued to slide into disrepair. The Headteacher, Mr Nevill Harrow tried hard to press the case for renewed investment in the school, but despite his best efforts it would not be until the 1950s that there were major changes to the school estate.

During WWII there were major changes to the running of the school. Mr Harrow was supposedly called up as a pilot officer in April 1941 and

demobilised as a flight lieutenant in 1945. At the time, little was known about his service, although it has since come to light that he had spent his time at Bletchley Park translating the German coded messages. Chiswick High School for Girls shared the school site for much of the war with DCGS students being educated in the morning and the girls from Chiswick in the afternoon. Various other evacuees joined the school during this time including Roger Moore who stayed in Amersham for several months.

Whilst the school's buildings remained unscathed during the war, there was great excitement when a RAF plane crashing into the trees at the edge of the fields in 1941. The RAF police were deployed to prevent a trade in souvenir hunting amongst the pupils. All in all, the school actually continued to flourish during the war, despite the loss of 24 Old Challoners who remain commemorated in the Hall today.

Post war, supported by changes in the 1944 Education Act which supported Grammar Schools, the school thrived. The curriculum expanded and the number of students sitting the Schools Certificate Sixth Examinations increased from 3 to 24. Sciences and Modern Languages were taught and the school also included a Secretarial Section to support the girls in the Sixth Form, many of whom went on to work in top administrative functions. The library boasted some 4000 books and students also excelled in sport, music and drama. However, whilst the school excelled academically, the state of the buildings reached a crisis point.

The solution eventually came during the 1950s. Owing to the numbers of students on site, the first inkling of a new school for girls was mentioned, although this was not to come to fruition for a further decade. At the end of the 1950s, a suite of new buildings including the current Hall and Tower Block were opened to much fanfare and finally enabled some of the more dilapidated buildings to be removed.

As the population in Amersham continued to grow, more and more pressure was put upon school places and the eventual solution was the opening of Dr Challoner's High School in 1962. Girls in the lower school and some female staff moved to Little Chalfont, whilst those in the Upper School continued in Amersham to complete their examination courses. By 1964, the school was once again boys-only, a situation which was to continue

until 2016 when the co-educational Sixth Form opened.

The last 60 years of the school's history have seen many changes. Buckinghamshire chose to retain the grammar school system which has dictated the school's admissions policy ever since. The site continues to be developed and the 21st Century has already seen the refurbishment and enhancement of sporting and music facilities, the building of new science laboratories and the school is currently working upon the creation of a new student support centre to help students with all non-academic aspects of school life.

Sport, Music, Drama, and all manner of co-curricular activities abound on site both during lunchtimes and after school and the school has embraced the need to support the mental health of students and staff alike. The re-admittance of girls for the Sixth Form from 2016 has been a huge success and the school is proud to have appointed its first female School Captain during its 400th Anniversary year.

The small school that started in the Market Square in 1624 has now grown to a community of students and staff numbering 1500 people. Whilst Robert Chaloner would not recognise education today, we continue to ensure his legacy continues to benefit the local community of Amersham.

Clare Atkinson

Development Director,
Dr. Challoner's Grammar School

New Information Panel Unveiled in Church Mead

About 35 people congregated on Church Mead on 13th July when the Mayor of Amersham, Dominic Pinkney, unveiled the Amersham Society's latest contribution to the Old Town environment. Back in 2018 we launched the well-used Old Town map, against the wall of the Memorial Gardens. Now we have installed a similar panel on the bank of the River Misbourne with a further one to be installed on Barn Meadow in the autumn. The Society's Chair, Edward Copisarow, thanked those who had supported the project: Amersham Town Council (whose staff had also installed the panel), Amersham Museum (and its photographer, Linda Gould), the Dulcie Denison will trust and two Society members Graham Cook and Brian Withington (in memory of his late wife).

Peter Borrows, the project leader, spoke about what they were hoping to achieve with the panels. The Misbourne is a chalk stream, globally rare. The industrialisation of the river damaged its ecology which Affinity Water is trying to rectify. The panels refer to the uses of the river to power the flour, paper and fulling mills. Amersham's brewing industry grew up alongside the river and a Roman road crossed it, following the route of prehistoric trackway, but the panels encourage viewers to look for the evidence. They are well-illustrated with maps, photographs and beautiful pictures of the wildlife, drawn by the designer Helen Walsh.



Congregation on Church Mead



Dominic Pinkney and Peter Borrows



Peter Borrows, Dominic Pinkney Mayor of Amersham and the Society's Chair, Edward Copisarow

Despite the wet evening, a change of date and venue (from the King's Arms Old Amersham to the Barn Hall Amersham on the Hill), the room was packed for a presentation by local historian Neil Rees on the story of a government in exile in Buckinghamshire during World War II.

The Czechoslovak Government in Exile in Bucks During WWII

The Society's March talk given by Neil Rees

In his opening address Neil explained that in order to comprehend the Buckinghamshire connection it was necessary to understand something of the Czech history.

It all started with a Professor Tomáš Masaryk, a political activist who had a campaign to give the Czechoslovaks independence from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and he came to live in London. From his house in West Hampstead he lobbied the UK government and ran a very successful newspaper campaign, with others, that one of the World War One aims should victory be achieved, was that the Austro-Hungarian Empire should be broken up and Czechoslovakia gain its independence. As part of his campaign he helped form an army of Czechoslovak people who fought alongside the allied troops. The idea

being that when the war was won it would earn them a seat at any negotiations. This indeed happened and at the Treaty of Versailles Czechoslovakia gained its independence and Tomáš Masaryk became its first President.

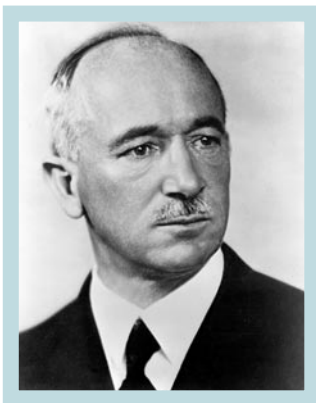
Czechoslovakia was divided into provinces reflecting the different languages of Czech and Slovak but it was not quite as simple as in the border lands, which later became known as Sudetenland, there were a lot of people who spoke German. Czechoslovakia was a very successful creation, a model of democracy with a lot of industry. In 1935 Dr Edvard Beneš became the second President and it was all working well until Hitler thought that the German speaking Sudetenland should be part of Germany.



Hitler threatened to unleash a European war unless the Sudetenland was surrendered to Germany. In September 1938 the leaders of Britain, France and Italy agreed to the German annexation of the Sudetenland in exchange for a pledge of peace from Hitler. Czechoslovakia which was not a party to the Munich negotiations, agreed under significant pressure from Britain and France. Consequently President Beneš had to go to his parliament and say there is an

agreement to which I was not party that we either hand over Sudetenland or the Germans may well invade. The Czechoslovakian Ambassador at the time, Jan Masaryk the son of the former President Tomáš Masaryk, when asked about the agreement said *“You’ve given us the option of committing suicide or being murdered”*.

President Beneš had no option but to resign and despite a feeling of UK betrayal come to London as a place to build up opposition as he felt that Hitler’s Germany had other ambitions. On 5 October 1938 German troops occupied Sudetenland. There then followed a series of other *“acquisitions”* within Czechoslovakia and in March 1939 German tanks rolled into Prague. By this time President Beneš was living in a house in Putney and he formed a Government in Exile made up of men who could escape from Czechoslovakia and those already in the UK, one of whom was Jan Masaryk who had arrived in England in 1925 as the Czech Ambassador. They set up a

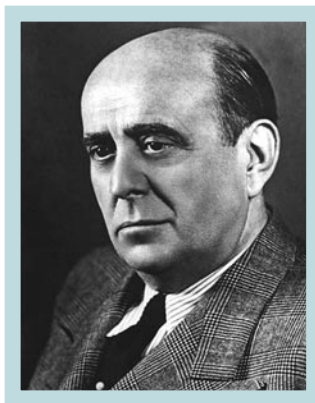


Dr Edvard Beneš

Government in Exile with offices in London to liaise with the British Government as well as look after its citizens, people who were leaving because of the occupation as well as about 670 Jewish children brought to the UK by the Kindertransport organisation. By the start of WWII there were about 20,000+ Czech people in the UK and the Government in Exile organised schools for the children, established a standing army to fight alongside the Allies, in addition to those joining the RAF.

In September 1940 having escaped the Germans in their own country the exiles were now subjected to the London Blitz, along with the residents of London. President Beneš house in London had a bomb land in the back garden and the house opposite was flattened by a bomb. He was lucky not to be killed. Coincidentally the Government in Exile offices in central London were one of the few offices in the area to escape bomb damage. Clearly London was not a safe place to be and a decision was made to relocate to Buckinghamshire which is how the County comes in to the story.

Jan Masaryk, the former Ambassador, had lived in England since June 1925 and was a very jovial, friendly, outgoing person, well liked in social circles. He was good friends with Anthony de Rothschild, whose family had business connections in Moravia, a province of Czechoslovakia, and



Jan Masaryk

regularly had Sunday lunch with Anthony De Rothschild at Ascott House. At one such meeting Jan mentioned the need for new accommodation in order for the President and his government to avoid the blitz. The outcome of this conversation was that the Abbey at Aston Abbots was rented to President Beneš for twenty guineas per week on a six month rolling contract or until the cessation of hostilities. So on 14 November 1940 President Beneš moved from Putney to the Abbey. Meanwhile in the nearby village of Wingrave, The Old Manor House was rented to the Czechoslovak Government in Exile for twenty pounds a week. This property housed the President's advisers and top officials. The distance between the two properties was the equivalent of Amersham to Chesham.

The houses were not offices; there were still offices in London to which the President and officials would still



travel on a regular basis; the journey by car taking about 90 minutes. Also if people came to visit President Beneš it was often as an overnight guest. In the War there was an overnight curfew commencing at 8:00pm so at times it was not possible to make the journey home following a visit. President Beneš was often visited by other heads of governments in exile, such as Charles De Gaulle of France, King Zog of Albania and General Sikorski, leader of the Polish Government-in-Exile. In this area of Buckinghamshire there were many WWII leaders living in secret safe houses whilst continuing to working in London.

What of Jan Masaryk? He had a flat in Westminster Gardens but was frequent visitor to both Wingrave and Aston Abbotts. He is remembered cycling between the two villages, rather than using a car, often stopping to chat with the locals. He became well known during the War as a broadcaster speaking directly from London to those in the occupied territories.

In 1943, to mark the 25th anniversary of the creation of Czechoslovakia President Beneš planted a lime tree, a Czech national symbol, in the grounds of Aston Abbotts Abbey. He was filmed planting the tree and the film was used to boost the morale of Czechoslovakians serving with the allies. The tree is still there today - a mighty lime tree.

During the war the Government in exile worked with the military and the Special Operations Executive (SOE) and they trained up men, some of whom parachuted back into the home country to carry out missions to disrupt the activities of the occupying Germans. The most famous operation was the assassination, in Prague, of Reinhard Heydrich, a high-ranking German SS officer and Deputy Protector of Bohemia and Moravia (two of the occupied provinces of Czechoslovakia). In addition at Hockliffe there was a communication radio station that was keeping in contact with the Czech resistance.

In 1945 as WWII was coming to an end there was a realisation that Czechoslovakia would be liberated. The Americans were advancing from the West and the Russian Red Army from the East but Stalin wanted to be the one who liberated the Czech Republic. There was the Yalta Agreement and President Beneš realised he would have to fly to Moscow to meet with Stalin. He had realised that unless he did a deal, Stalin would put his man in from the outset, and he would not get back into power. He did a deal with Stalin and was brought in by the Red Army from the East and re-elected as President.

So what was the legacy? At the end of the war there were approximately 600 British women who had married Czechoslovaks, some of whom went back to the home country of their spouse. Initially they were welcomed as returning heroes. People were learning English and there was a lot of goodwill. All was well until 25 February 1948 when everything changed overnight as a result of a Communist coup in Prague. Men who had been heroes became traitors as the communists told a different narrative. The wonderful dream became a nightmare! Some escaped back to Britain, others were killed, put into prison or forced to work in the uranium mines.

On 10 March 1948 Jan Masaryk was found dead in Prague and on 7 June 1948 President Beneš resigned and on 3 September 1948 he died.

Back in England some had returned in 1948 and went to live with their wives'

families. Some changed their names, many kept quiet for fear of reprisals, particularly during the cold war.

However, locally the memory of them never left and in 2005 the village of Aston Abbotts marked the 60th anniversary of the end of the war with a celebration of their Czech connection with an exhibition in the Village Hall.

And there is one lasting memorial to the presence of the Czechoslovakian Government in Exile in the area – a bus shelter! The bus stop is halfway between Aston Abbotts and Wingrave and people would catch the bus to Aylesbury and the children a bus to Aylesbury Grammar. The story is that Jan Masaryk would when cycling between the villages saw people standing bedraggled in the rain and said to President Beneš we should get them a bus shelter and that is what happened.



The bus shelter is still in use and bears a plaque which reads:

“This bus shelter was donated by President Beneš of Czechoslovakia to thank the people of Aston Abbotts & Wingrave whilst he and his cabinet were in exile here during World War II”

John Suckling

The County Flower of Buckinghamshire

The Chiltern Gentian

'The time has come for us to cherish our green inheritance'

David Attenborough

The Chilterns are located on a chalk escarpment which was formed between 65 and 95 million years ago from plankton sediment compressed deep down in the

oceans that covered our land at the time. Chalk creates a very special habitat which is loved by certain wildflowers. A beautiful example is the local Chiltern Gentian (*gentianella germanica*) which, in the UK, only grows in the Chilterns and is the County Flower of Buckinghamshire.

The Chiltern Gentian's purple trumpet-shaped flowers appear in the chalk grassland between mid-August and October. It is very similar to the Autumn Gentian, but is distinguished by its white (rather than pink) hairs at the top of the flower, its narrower leaves and the crinkly pattern in the tubular underside of its flowers.

Sadly you are unlikely to find it growing in Amersham; however it can be seen in the Prestwood Nature Reserve as well as the BBOWT reserves at Dancersend, Warburg, Homefield Wood and Yoesden, which are a delight to visit at any time of the year.



By **Marieke Bosman** from Wild Amersham

Amersham Society summer outing

Wednesday 26th June 2024

The Amersham Society annual outing took place on Wednesday 26th June; in the morning, to the very grand and imposing mansion of Stonor Park a few miles from Henley then, after lunch, a delightful boat trip on the River Thames departing from Henley.

After a short delay the coach arrived and all 37 members from Top and Old Amersham boarded and our journey started - in the best of the weather for the whole of June. The coach journey turned out to be interesting and the country route scenic. However we did arrive slightly disheveled so were very pleased to be greeted by the charming and welcoming helpers in the 13th Century Medieval Hall. We began and ended our visit in "The Pantry café", first with a cup of coffee and at the end with a delicious lunch.

After our 'welcome' break, we split into two groups, with most enlightening and interesting guides, who gave us an

in-depth tour covering the history of Stonor Park and its previous and present owners.

Stonor Park is a private historic country house and deer park nestling in the Chiltern Hills four miles from Henley comprising of 250 acres, a 12th Century private Chapel and the remains of a prehistoric stone circle. Behind the main house, we saw a walled garden in the Italianate style on a rising slope and their herd of fallow deer.

It is the ancestral home and seat of the Stonor family, Baron Camoys. The current Lord Camoys is William Stonor. Stonor House has been home to the Stonor family for more than eight centuries, where it displays family portraits, tapestries, bronzes and ceramics. There is an imposing library that houses about 5,500 beautiful leather bound books. Construction of the house probably begun soon after 1280 when Sir Richard Stonor married his second wife, Margaret Harnhull



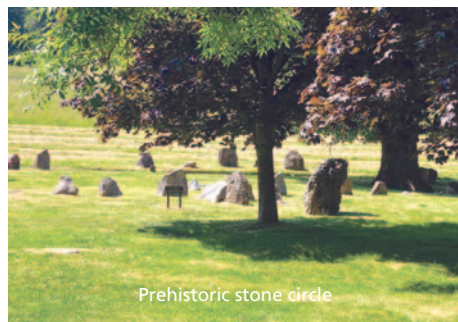
During and after the English Reformation the Stonor family were recusants. The Jesuit priests Edmund Campion and Robert Parsons lived and worked at Stonor Park, and in 1581 Campion's "*Decem Rationes*" was printed here on a secret press. A raid took place and the press was discovered. Campion and Parsons had left a few days earlier, but Lady Cecily Stonor, her son John, the Jesuit priest William Hartley, the printers and four servants were all taken prisoner. Despite further prosecutions and fines the Stonors remained Roman Catholics throughout the 17th and 18th centuries which also enabled the local villagers to remain Roman Catholic by allowing them to worship in the private chapel.

The Chapel of the Holy Trinity was built in the late 12th Century on the site of the prehistoric stone circle. The south east corner of the chapel rests upon one of these stones, a symbol of Christianity adopting this ancient site. Sunlight flooded through the chapel stained glass windows lighting up the

interior. Here visitors can see Graham Green's gift, the Stations of the Cross, carved by Jozef Janas, a Polish prisoner of war in WWII. The Chapel is used regularly for Masses, and weddings.



The house was built on the site of the prehistoric stone circle which is still visible. The stones are a mixture of sarsens and puddingstone. The current positioning of the stones is as a result of 17th century landscaping.



The real story of Stonor is a history of characters. For over 850 years the families have left their mark in both private and public life. The portraits looking down at us in the house tell stories of service to the country and family life.

The first mention of Stonor is 'Stonor Lege' or stony hill appearing in AD774 with the first recorded family member, Robert De Stanora, living there in the late 12th Century. Throughout the next three centuries the family prospered, marrying rich heiresses from powerful local families, acquiring lands and titles and farming flocks of sheep. Expansion of the family fortunes came to an abrupt end, as the Stonor's refused to accept Henry VIII as head of the church. By 1650 all of the Stonor estates, with the exception

of Stonor Valley, had been sold to pay recusancy fines.

After generations of lobbying, the Catholic Emancipation Act was finally passed in 1829 when the 3rd Lord Camoys embraced government and public life. Stonor Park is now home to three generations of the Stonor Family: the present Lord & Lady Camoys live in the main house with their three children and Lady Elizabeth Camoys living in the recently restored 16th century Wool House.

Afternoon Tea on the Thames

After a delicious lunch at Stonor Park we boarded the coach to head off to our next destination, Henley, for a boat trip on a very impressive 'Hibernian.' We were driven gingerly along to Henley by our coach driver who did a good job in dropping us off just around the corner from the boat.

The sun shone and weather was getting hotter by the minute. There we found beautifully laid out tables for tea, with little cakes which were delicious.

What a wonderful way to end our day; we went upstream and saw lovely gardens either side of the river and then made a loop to follow part of the regatta course. Exactly two hours later we were



back to where we boarded, where the coach driver was waiting for us.

A safe journey back after a wonderful day organised so successfully by Dorothy Symes and Geraldine Marshall-Andrew and their team of helpers.

Barbara Turner



These are not just random stones but what was their purpose?

If you have ever walked on the north side of the Broadway, between the Memorial Gardens and the Old Town Car Park you have seen them. If you didn't trip over them, you must have seen them, even if you didn't notice them, for they are set into the pavement either side of the entrance gate to St Mary's Court. (Back in the 1970s, they were at the entrance to the gas works.) They only made sense to me when I realised they were close to the line of a Roman road. So, were they Roman milestones? No!

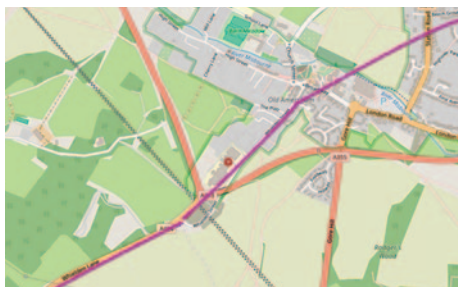
If you mention Roman roads, people want to know what it was called but the named roads (Watling Street, Ermine Street, etc) were the motorways of their day, the military roads, for the rapid deployment of the army. However, for the most part, the Romans used existing, pre-historic tracks.

After all, these would follow the easiest route between settlements, along valleys, avoiding marshy land and fording rivers at the shallowest part.

In this case, the road came from Verulamium (St Albans) through Amersham towards Penn and onwards, to cross the River Thames at Reading. The footpath that crosses the field diagonally behind Tesco is all you can see of it now. If you take a ruler and continue the straight line of the path on a map it crosses the river Misbourne at what is now the Old Town car park, goes through the archway of the Griffin Inn and joins Whielden Street at Whielden Green.

In prehistoric times, it was common to mark the line of a track with large boulders – sarsens. They can no longer be seen in the field behind Tesco but the two set into the Broadway must have been there at some point. There is in fact a further one set into the wall in the court yard of the Griffin (opposite the end of the barn) and two more supporting either side of the archway of the Saracen's Head in Whielden Street. So, they are pre-Roman way marks.

Peter Borrows





Introduction

‘Manor House’ first appears on plans in 1719, though it is likely a farm house existed well before then. The large ‘Bucks Barn’ (to the west) has remained broadly in its current form since then. By contrast, the house has been extended at least five times. Recurring themes about ‘Manor House’ in this period emerge: how closed the community and class structures were in Chesham Bois (until well into the Modern Era). Further, how the development of ‘Manor House’ mirrors the wider changes in society and the economy in the area. During this period, the name of the property also varied considerably. In this article the current name, ‘Manor House’, is used throughout.

The Estate Farm Era (1719-1896)

‘Manor House’ formed part of the Cheyne’s estate in Chesham Bois at the start of this era. Farmer John Howe lived there with his family and farm-workers at the centre of a 200 acre farm. It supplied both the estate and the London market with a variety of food. Following the Cheyne’s, their estate (by now comprising over 4,000 acres including Manor House), was inherited in 1735 by John Russell, sixth Duke of Bedford. ‘Manor House’ was developed as a farm, especially when part of the Bedford estate: possibly including the building of the middle section of the house to the left of the bay windows. ‘Manor House’ and 200 acres were sold in 1809 to the mining entrepreneur, Sir Robert Spedding, before being sold again in 1824 (now a mere 120 acres) to Edward Kingstone, head of a banking family.

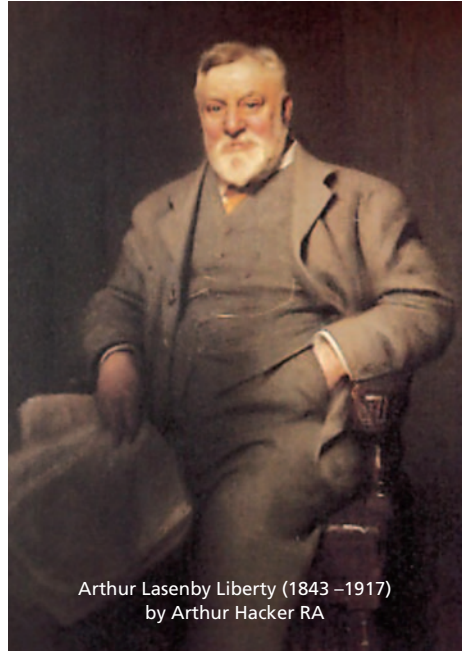
By this time the property started to be perceived less as an estate farm and more as “*an eligible situation for a gentleman’s residence*” (as contemporary sales particulars described it).

The farming tenants of ‘Manor House’ came and went (having neither security of tenure, nor any right of succession over the property they rented). Amongst them were names familiar in the area: Witney, Batchelor, White, Pope and Clare. Whilst these farmers were not part of the gentry, they were seen as a yeoman class: not necessarily land owners (though some did own small pieces of land) but those having a position and relative wealth in society marking them out from both the farm workers and labourers who worked for them and the estate owners.

Such farmers also undertook prominent civic responsibilities (as constables, surveyors or overseers for poor law matters) as their status required. In several Censuses, taken in the latter part of this era, the farmer at ‘Manor House’ is often described as a ‘farm bailiff’, indicating they undertook wider duties on behalf of the estate.

The era of farming ended in 1896. ‘Manor House’ (like many other farms in the area) struggled to remain viable. By the mid-1800s, it started to be more affected by a sustained decline in agriculture. Contemporaneously, expansion of railways into London favoured more distant farms: often with better soil quality and more efficient systems than Bucks farms.

The expansion of the London railway to Amersham in 1892 (what is now the Met Line) meant that regular commuting to/from London in pursuit of professional activities became, for the first time, feasible. So, the value of land no longer exclusively depended on its agricultural activities.



Arthur Lasenby Liberty (1843 –1917)
by Arthur Hacker RA

Possibly these factors resulted in the Kingstone’s disposing of ‘Manor House’. A more commercially minded investor, Chesham born Arthur Lasenby Liberty, founder of the eponymous store, eventually purchased it. The exact year of Liberty’s purchase is not known, probably in the 1880s. However, he sold ‘Manor House’ in 1896, by auction and subsequently purchased a property at The Lee, where he ended up creating a 3,000 acre estate.

Throughout this era until the last traditional farm tenant, Henry Glenister (who died in the early 1880s) the size of the farm at ‘Manor House’ remained at 120 acres. However, in contrast, the next (and final) farming tenant, John Hailey Morten (from 1883 until 1896) had no prior farming experience (being a Chesham brewer). His family at ‘Manor House’ included his wife, Eliza. She was born and raised in Madras: one of a number of residents over a 50 year period with a strong Indian connection, reflecting the significant impact which India had on British society at this time. Morten’s exploits (often recorded in the Bucks Herald’s court reports) give the impression of a ‘rough diamond’; more trader than farmer. A sale of agricultural equipment at the end of his tenancy indicated he relied on obsolete farming equipment. ‘Manor House’ had, by the time of Liberty’s sale, shrunk to some 62 acres.

Modern Era (1896- to date)

‘Manor House’ with its now 6½ acres was purchased along with other parts of the farm by a local builder, George Pearce, described in a Census as a ‘scrap iron and metal merchant’. The break-up of the lands attached to ‘Manor House’ in 1896 was the catalyst of much of the development of ‘modern’ Chesham Bois.

It is thought that Pearce removed several wooden barns at ‘Manor House’

(but not the ‘Bucks Barn’) so as to develop a more desirable residence. Col Thomas Trueman, a retired Indian army colonel, took a 14 year lease of the property, in about 1898. In 1905 Trueman, then aged 69, married Lady Susan Byng, daughter of the Earl of Stratford, after which they lived on her farm nearby. Both were active in civic society: in one military charity, Trueman was a committee member alongside Arthur Liberty’s wife.

By now a world more familiar to us starts to emerge with the ‘modern essentials of civilised living’ coming to Chesham Bois (with supplies of water, electricity and later a public sewage system). Equally, after Trueman, we start to see occupants of ‘Manor House’ who were regular commuters to London to pursue their professions. Indeed from 1922 until 1937 the train station was called “Amersham & Chesham Bois” as if to emphasise a separate village, a mile away, as a place a commuter might live.

In 1906, Trueman assigned his lease to Claude Goddard, a West End property agent, who moved in until 1910 with his new wife, Annie. Then Henry Loebel, a City stockbroker, took on the lease with his young family, governess and servants. After George Pearce’s death in 1912, his sister, Susan, granted a further long lease of ‘Manor House’ to Loebel who stayed on until 1918.

In late 1918, Louise Jopling and her third husband, George Rowe acquired 'Manor House'. Much has been written about Jopling, a well-known artist, far less about George. He was the first of five lawyers to have lived in 'Manor House' over the next 100 years. George was senior partner of a well-known London law firm and chairman of an insurance company.

Louise also made her mark on 'Manor House' itself. There is ample evidence that shortly after moving in, Jopling commissioned the western section of the property (next to the Bucks Barn) creating a studio and balcony for herself. Hidden away, there is still a barrel ceiling and a blocked up window at the rear which would have given the studio what artists like Jopling desire, 'North Light'.

Louise's son (and godson of Sir John Millais), Lindsay Millais Jopling who was another lawyer became deputy commissioner of Lucknow (in modern Uttar Pradesh) until 1922 when he moved in with his mother and George at 'Manor House'. Lindsay also purchased the next door derelict barn (now known as 'Manor Barn') from the executors of Susan Pearce which he subsequently modernised and lived in. After Louise's death, George Rowe moved back to London and 'Manor House' was sold by Lindsay: the sale particulars of which show the first known photograph of the property in 1934.



Louise Jopling by Sir John Millais

Both were also prominent locally. George in the Conservative Party and Louise was the inaugural President of the Chiltern Arts club (a contemporary committee member of which was Lady Susan Trueman).

They were a remarkable couple. Married for 46 years until Louise's death in 1933, George (13 years her junior) was the epitome of a prominent member of a highly conservative profession, whilst she was a campaigner for women's rights and a recognised artist.



Louise Jopling (1843 –1933)

The new owner was Lady Lillian Sanders, who lived there from 1935 (with her husband, beer industry lobbyist and solicitor, Sir Edgar Sanders). They undertook a great deal of work to the property as well as being keen gardeners. Clearly gardens were a passion for the Sanders who subsequently moved to 'Rignalls' in Great Missenden, a property with a far larger garden, designed by Gertrude Jekyll.



Sir Edgar Sanders

In 1937, Mrs Edith Strain purchased 'Manor House'. Little is known of her. She did, however, previously attend Louise Jopling's funeral and was a woman of some means: undertaking several cruises travelling, naturally, first class. The next owner was a bit of a throwback: Sidney Prince. He was the first sole male owner in this modern era, a retired farmer originally from Essex who lived in 'Manor House', with his wife, Pearl, and servants.

Subsequent to Sidney Prince, the remaining owners of 'Manor House' are a series of London commuting professionals. There is a confirmed story that in the 1980s, Mrs Thatcher, visited 'Manor House' when consider-

ing her next home after No 10. Apparently, they took their interest no further on the grounds of security advice.

The first post war owner, Martyn Wilkins, a City insurance broker purchased 'Manor House' in 1946. By then, the studio had, according to his daughter, been redesignated. The Wilkins commissioned a charming woodcut

block, showing the frontage of the now renamed 'Manor House'. Also, what had been 'the balcony' on the most western end of the property was enclosed.

Subsequent owners have made further changes to 'Manor House' including: splitting the studio and balcony into bedrooms and a bathroom replacing the 'balcony' window in the 1960s; and, in the early 21st century, a kitchen extension at the rear.

Changes to the scale and size of the property as well as in its uses and people who occupied or owned it, reflect much of how this part of Buckinghamshire has developed over the last three centuries.

David Roberts



Manor House in the 1940s.

Credit: Wilkins family

The Newest Building in the High Street

Methodism in Amersham

Revd James Patterson

Methodist Presbyterian for Amersham High Street, Chesham and Prestwood,
in the Amersham Methodist Circuit



Revd
James Patterson

When I was informed by the Methodist Church that I was going to undertake my first appointment in Amersham, my first reaction was ‘Where?’ Coming from the north-east, my geography of down south was somewhat lacking I’m afraid. I knew I would be the minister for three churches, not just Amersham but Chesham and Prestwood too. When I arrived, particularly here in Amersham, I found that one of the two churches (St John’s in top Amersham) had unfortunately just closed, and that the one in Old Amersham, although small, had a great deal of energy about it. But both tell a rich history of ordinary folk seeking to live out their faith in God through their service in and to the community.

I moved here in 2022 and I remember one of the first statements I heard with regard the chapel in Old Amersham: *‘It’s the newest building on the High Street!’*. My reaction was something like Victor Meldrew in One Foot in the Grave: *‘I don’t believe it!’* But I suppose it is as it was built in 1899 and I think most, if not all, of the other buildings pre-date that. For those of you who do not know, the Methodist Church in Old Amersham is on the High Street opposite The Swan and next door to The Eagle. I always find it funny that a Methodist has to navigate by the pubs on their way to church.



A History of Methodism in Britain

The stereotype of Methodists is that we don't drink, for some that will be true with the influence of the Temperance movement in the 1800s and early 1900s, but there is more to Methodism than that. The Methodist Church in Britain was founded by, amongst others, Revd John Wesley in the 18th Century who toured the country, preaching in fields and market places to people who felt disenfranchised by the Church. As they began to trust in God as their Saviour, Wesley began to create Class meetings that met in people's homes for prayer, studying the Bible and nurturing one another in their new found faith. As these meetings grew Societies developed, with Amersham being an example, to the point where they started to build their own preaching houses (chapels in other words). The Societies were connected to others in a geographical area known as Circuits with Amersham being part of the High Wycombe Circuit to begin with. Wesley encouraged such people to attend their local parish church for Holy Communion as well as meet in their Classes during the week for that mutual nurturing aforementioned.

A History of Methodism in Amersham

The Chapel on the High Street in Old Amersham became the permanent home of the Methodist people in 1900, yet Methodists had been meeting in the Old Town since at least 1818. Now I'm not the best at mathematics but I gather that is 206 years, potentially meeting in people's homes to start with which was very much how the Methodist Church in Britain began its life.

The Amersham Methodist Society in Old Amersham met in the home of Dr Thomas Gray from the 1820s, but by 1851 they had moved to a converted cottage at Bury End where Dr Gray reported that there were 23 members who attended a morning service.



Bury End Cottage

Upon his move to London in the 1860s, the Society began to rent space in the Friends' Meeting House in Whielden Street where they continued to meet until 1900. The first stone of the new chapel was laid at a special ceremony on October 27th 1899, with the building officially opened on Wednesday February 28th 1900 – it certainly didn't take long to build! The land used had been formally occupied by dilapidated alms-houses, and was an opportunity for the Methodist Society to build a purpose-built chapel after 40 years at the Friends' Meeting House. A Sunday School formed which seems to have attracted up to 67 children at one time, perhaps more but unfortunately that closed in 2000.

Yet many people I have met since moving here share many happy memories of their time in the Sunday School.



Sunday School c.1931



Woodside Road Methodist Church

As for the Methodist Church at St John's in top Amersham, it's history seems to go back to the mid-1800s. A group of Methodists began to meet at Loudhams Farm in Burtons Lane in Little Chalfont, at the time part of Amersham Common; apparently their meetings were always

followed by a good tea! They moved into a purpose-built chapel on Chestnut Lane in 1860 then into larger premises on Woodside Road, Amersham in 1924. During



St John's shortly after completion c.1960

the war and afterwards the Society there grew with people moving out of London, when in 1960, the Methodist Society moved into the premises we now see at St John's. The architect, Alister MacDonald, sought to design not just a church building as a place of worship but as a centre for community life. The central garden surrounded by buildings was to be like the ancient cloisters of old monasteries as a place of contemplation. The cross on the front of the building, as well as being a symbol of the Christian faith, depicts suffering, creation, richness and sin.

It was so sad that it had to close in 2022, but with people having moved away or gone to glory, numbers had significantly reduced. It was felt it was not sustainable to keep it open. However, we wish Restore Hope well as the new owners of the premises at St John's and the exciting plans they have in serving the community.



The interior of the church, 2023

Methodism in Amersham Today

When I moved to the area in 2022 I found a church, that although small, has a great deal of energy and a willingness to serve the community in many different ways. Over the years there have been various groups that have met for different people and ages, but today we have a bi-monthly Ploughmans' Lunch on a Monday, Fun and Friendship group monthly on a Friday, and a weekly coffee morning with light lunch on a Wednesday. You are very welcome to join us for these or our 9.30am services on a Sunday. You may have also heard of our cream teas on Heritage Day, or enjoyed our Carol services at Christmas.

Our church based in the old town continues the legacy of over 200 years of Methodist worship in Amersham and will hopefully continue to be a witness for God for many more years to come. We, with the other churches in the area, strive to be a place of sanctuary, hope and justice where all can know and experience the love of God, whether that's in worship or over a good cuppa.

River Misbourne Survey Report

Carried out by **Tim Harmer** and **Lesley Harmer**
on 8th July 2024

In August 2022, Tim and Lesley Harmer conducted a survey into the state of the Misbourne between Shardeloes Lake and “*Monty’s*” footbridge, east of Bury farm. Their report can be read in our newsletter dated September 2022,

<https://www.amershamsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/amersham-society-newsletter-sep-2022.pdf>.

Now, two years on, they have repeated the survey. And, for ease of comparison, Tim and Lesley have used the same reference points as in the 2022 survey.

I’m sure we are all relieved that Amersham is upstream from the sewage Balancing Tanks at the Amersham Recycling Centre. The recent exceptionally high rainfall prior to this survey resulted in the tanks discharging dreadful amounts of effluent into the surrounding fields with knock-on effects for both Chalfont St Giles (the village show has had to be cancelled this year) and Chalfont St Peter (where Thames Water deployed road tankers 24/7 to remove “*wastewater*”).

Started: around 10:30.

Weather: Sun and Cloud looking like rain.

Good news!

The river is running well with good flow.

Area surveyed: from the bottom end of Shardeloes Lake to the footbridge and ford. (Ref: track from London Road East.)

- 1 Grill from lake looks clear. River running well and the river behind the Cricket Club looks clear and is running well. However, there is weed.
- 2 Between Shardeloes Drive and Amersham by-pass bridge and further along to Amersham High Street bridge: This is harder to see because of a ditch cut across the foot path. However, river running well but a little rubbish on the side banks.
- 3 Copas Farm is private land, so unable to undertake survey. However, from the High Street bridge River running well.
- 4 Mill Lane. The river is behind locked gates giving very little visual access.
- 5 The stretch of river immediately downstream from Mill Lane to the corner of Barn Meadow is running well and clear on one side, but has thick vegetation on the cottages' side; But not a problem. Riparian owners need to keep their eye on it. The fence beside the footpath is in need of repair.



- 6 The Barn Meadow reach is clear and flowing well.
- 7 We did not have access to the river between the culvert and Pondwicks. At Pondwicks the river is running well. There is thick vegetation on the south side but this is not a problem.
- 8 The two backwaters (or scrapes) cut from the side of the river last year are full and appear to aid the flow of the river.
- 9 At Badminton Court the river is flowing well. Vegetation on one side but again not a problem.
- 10 Church Mead. There is vegetation in the river but it's all running freely.
- 11 The public car park at the back of Tesco: no supermarket trolleys found in the river! The river is all clean running well.



- 12 The river at the back of Tesco looks clear of rubbish.
- 13 The river is running well behind Tesco car park. The overflow culvert looks OK with no excess rubbish. Water is flowing well into the overflow Culvert.
- 14 At Station Road Bridge the river is flowing well. There is a large amount of weed growing but flowing OK.
- 15 West Arch of the road bridge to Ambers and river fork at the old Lookers Jaguar Garage (site of the new Aldi store) the river is running through but there is a lot of vegetation.
- 16 Area from the old Lookers Jaguar Garage the river is running well, no problems seen, only a Tesco trolley on the embankment.
- 17 From where the river emerges from the Two Arches under London Road West, river running well.
- 18 Moving under the A413 bypass going along the river towards the foot bridge, no problems seen.
- 19 At the re-routed river bank area there is good flow. However, there is a fallen tree laying across the river and rubbish on the opposite bank.
- 20 On reaching the ford and foot bridge. There is flooding into the fields. The water is running into the field from the ford. Thus, the footpath over Monty's footbridge is not passable.





The Society's Summer Garden Party

If you believe in déjà vu, then for confirmation look no further than the evening of 12th June 2024; that evening turned out to be little different to 5th July 2023. We'd had the same miserable day but, as was the case last year, the sun started to peek through for the start of our annual Garden Party attended by 53 of our members.

We then happily enjoyed a couple of hours of friendly chatter and an excellent array of canapes and drinks, masterminded by Dorothy Symes and Geraldine Marshall-Andrew and executed by an attentive team of volunteers drawn from, to quote Dorothy, the younger members of the Chases and Marshall-Andrew families.

A big thank you must go to Su and Quentin Chases, who acting as genial hosts yet again, allowed us to roam freely in their lovely garden and make use of their kitchen.



NOTICEBOARD

Programme of Talks and Events

Talks are held in the Kings Chapel, 30 High Street, Old Amersham.
Coffee, tea and biscuits served from 7:30pm, with talks starting at 8pm.

Wednesday 25th September

Man on the Spot

Bill Hamilton's career has been in journalism and broadcasting ending as a special correspondent for BBC TV News.

Wednesday 30th October

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Followed by a talk on the **Chapter Two Community Bookshop** by the manager Mark Jackson-Hancock.

All profits from the shop go to support the St Francis Hospice.

Wednesday 27th November

Arrietty's Diary

A talk by Dr Irving Finkel about one of the tiny people, who features in "The Borrowers", a book by Mary Norton.

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