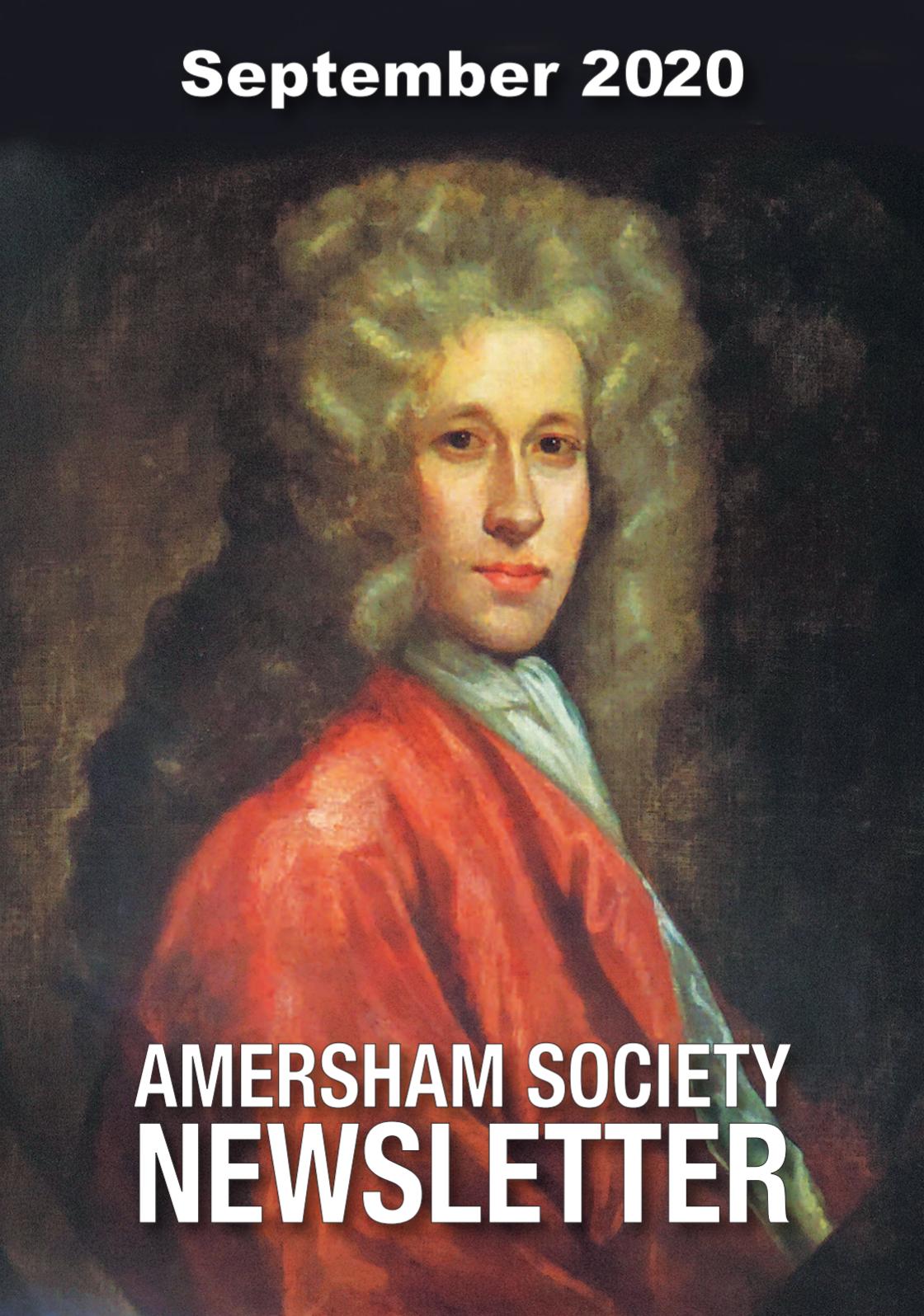


**September 2020**

A portrait of a man with a large, curly, light-colored wig, wearing a red robe over a light blue shirt. The background is dark and textured.

**AMERSHAM SOCIETY  
NEWSLETTER**



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# Report from the Chair for the AGM

**T**his past year has certainly been full of change and we have all had to make major adjustments to our lives. I very much hope that members are keeping safe and well and are also managing successfully to navigate their way through the new routines. It seems that the pandemic is likely to continue to have a major impact on our lives for some time to come, certainly into next year.

After last year's AGM the Amersham Society were able to continue for a time with our planned activities, joining with the Old Amersham Business Association for the Magical Christmas Evening in early December and holding as usual the three planned talks in November, January and February. And then in March came the major upheaval to our day to day lives as it became clear how serious the Corona epidemic was and that social distancing and other measures to limit infection had to be introduced.

In common with other organisations throughout the country the Amersham Society had to postpone all our remaining plans for this year, the talks in the Kings Chapel, the annual summer outing and the planned summer parties. The March talk on the World of the Honey Bee sadly had to be postponed at fairly short notice. Your committee realised that in these troubled times it was important to maintain, even to raise, the profile of the society and to keep in touch with members, albeit in different ways. To enable us to achieve this we had certain advantages. First we have our Website Manager, or "Tech Whizz" as the Vice Chair Edward Copisarow calls her, Elena Morgan. There is a clear and regularly updated Website also our long established system of E-alerts. And there is Zoom.

With Zoom we have been able to reinstate our programme of talks. In addition, to make up for the cancelled summer events, we have had a splendid summer season of three bonus talks given on Zoom by distinguished speakers about their very different collections. We have been really pleased to have these very interesting and special talks. Many thanks to the three speakers concerned. All the talks have been well attended despite some warm summer evenings and as a result of the clear instructions given, those who want to listen to the talk have had no difficulty in joining the meeting and taking part in the questions and answers afterwards. We have found that the speakers' illustrations shown on Zoom are often sharper and brighter than those shown at the other gatherings. They are certainly easily

visible as we relax in our homes. We have been very grateful for the way our speakers and members have taken to Zoom and for the positive comments that we have had.

We shall shortly be putting together the programme of talks for 2021. We expect that these will continue to be held on Zoom although we do look forward to the day when it will be possible for us to meet again in the Kings Chapel.

**If any of you have not received the E-alerts about the talks or other events, this may be because we do not yet have your email address. So if you believe that you are missing out and would like to be able to join the Zoom talks and receive other information would you please send us your email address.**

## Annual General Meeting

September heralds the start of autumn and also, importantly for the Amersham Society, the approach of our AGM, which will be held on Wednesday, 28th October at 8.00pm via Zoom. Often an AGM is viewed as a rather inconvenient interruption to the more exciting parts of the evening. But it is an important event for the

organisation concerned, giving an opportunity to review the past year and plan for the next twelve months. Obviously the past six months have been exceptionally difficult, but the Society has not only survived but done well because of the hard work of the Committee. My grateful thanks to everyone for the tremendous amount

of hard work and support, also to those members who, though not on the Committee, are very ready to contribute and take on different tasks.

I would be really pleased if one or two other members of our Society would put yourselves forward to become a member of the committee, or if that is a step too far, perhaps you might consider attending one of the next Committee Meetings to find out what is involved. These meetings take

place every two months, at present by Zoom and last for two hours, not onerous. Otherwise would you please consider writing an article for the Newsletter or writing the report on a talk? And it would be very helpful if you contacted me or another member of the committee soon to say how you would like to help.

Immediately after the AGM Alice Morgan will give an illustrated talk about the Work of the Horse Trust in Speen.

## Current Areas of Concern and Interest

### The Market Hall clock

The clock needs to be repaired and we are waiting for Buckinghamshire Council to consider the planning application for this and to give agreement for the work to go ahead. Annie Hamilton Pike has kindly agreed to follow this up on behalf of the Amersham Society and the Museum and encourage action to be taken so that this important work can be completed.

### HS2

Work on the HS2 development is going on all round us. The Amersham Action Group are monitoring this as closely as possible, commenting where necessary and informing the Society of work being done. For further information see [info@hs2amersham.org.uk](mailto:info@hs2amersham.org.uk)

### Planning Applications

We shall during the coming year continue to monitor **these** and draw your attention to those that might affect our area and its residents.

Finally members will wish to know that this year the **Old Amersham Business Association Magical Christmas Evening will be on Friday, 4th December**. The Amersham Society is again supporting this special evening. The Christmas lights will be switched on at 6.00pm. There will be various stalls in the Broadway. More detailed information will be distributed nearer the time. Do come and join us.

**Dorothy Symes**

# ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Society's Annual General Meeting will be held on Wednesday 28th October 2020 at 8.00 pm. On Zoom.

## AGENDA

1. Apologies for absence.
2. Minutes of the 2019 Annual General Meeting and business arising.
3. Chairman's Annual Report.
4. Honorary Treasurer's Report and Statement of Accounts.
5. Election of Committee Members and Officers.\*\*
6. Election of Independent Examiner of the Accounts.
7. Any other business.

The **Annual General Meeting** will be followed by a Talk :-

### ● **The Work of the Horse Trust, Speen**

Alice Morgan will tell us about the Trust's work offering retirement and respite for working horses and ponies and also sanctuary for those horses, ponies and donkeys that have suffered cruelty and neglect.

\*\* Election of committee Members and Officers  
Nominations should be sent by 21st October to the Hon Secretary at 162 High Street, Amersham, HP7 0EG.

# VE DAY 2020 in Whielden Street



It was a bright May morning. Bird song filled the street, just a trickle of traffic. Bunting fluttered on the front of many houses like the wings of excited butterflies. Despite the lockdown and social distancing the street was ready to party!

Just before 11 o'clock, doors tentatively began to open and people stood in family groups to observe the two-minute silence to honour and remember all those who had made this peaceful moment possible.

Slowly, during the next few hours the street was transformed. Tables, decorously covered with cloths, and chairs appeared in front of each house. The notes of Glenn Miller filtered down the street. Eating, drinking, dancing (of course, only with members of your own household), laughter - a street party was in progress. George VI, Winston Churchill, the Queen were all shared and as it became dark everyone ended up singing We'll Meet Again with Vera Lynn. Perhaps the best memory of all was seeing and hearing the children playing and taking over the road.



75 years ago, we were two small children who can barely remember the VE Day celebrations but we were there without a doubt. Whielden Street residents in 2020 contributed to Amersham's social history and proved the sacrifice our parents made was truly worthwhile.

**Marian Borrows**

*photographs by* **Peter Borrows**



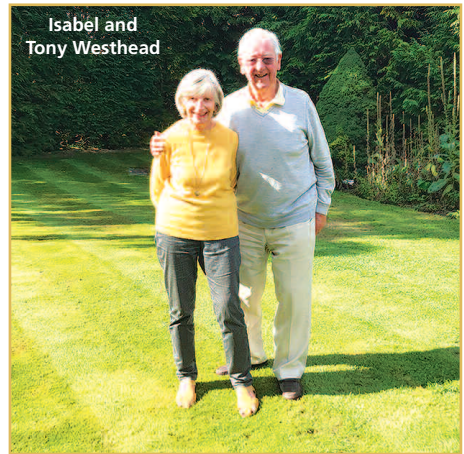
# At the Start of Lockdown

We asked members if they would write short articles or notes giving a snapshot of their thoughts and experiences during this strange time – these are some of the responses.

## Lockdown “P&Q”

It is certainly a strange and unusual situation that we all find ourselves in. Everybody has had to change their behaviour and lifestyle in ways that were quite unexpected. We feel extremely sorry for all our local shops, restaurants and businesses who have been badly affected and forced temporarily to close down. Although a few have adapted valiantly. We are able to count our blessings being already retired so no dramatic change there! Also we are lucky enough to have a beautiful garden in which to enjoy quite remarkably nice weather with lots of sunshine. It is the family and friends who are all missed. But it is the same for everybody in that respect. Thank God for technology and Amersham Society Zoom talks.

The prevailing “*P & Q peace and quiet*” is the biggest change. No aircraft noise, minimal traffic noise and the operatic birdsong rises above it all as if they are singing in a concert hall where a pin can be heard to drop. What are they saying to each other? It is a pleasure to see the High Street with much less traffic and



without the 15 vehicles usually parked all day long in the middle of the road at the Crescent. It is looking pretty much how it must have looked years ago. We are very lucky to live in Old Amersham and at times like this one appreciates its unique features like the Memorial Gardens even more.

It is difficult to avoid watching too much TV but there are books to be read and Hilary Mantel's latest the Mirror and the Light which looks fearsomely long at about 867 pages can be tackled in Lockdown conditions.

**Tony Westhead**

# Life During Lockdown

**S**o much time at home has given me a great opportunity to spend time in the garden. The beds are fairly well established with shrubs and perennials which require regular but uninspiring attention. At the time of lockdown, things were just getting into their stride and weeding (not excessive during the dry conditions) was all that was needed.

With the prospect of issues with obtaining supplies of fresh food, especially vegetables and salads, I decided on the 21st March to invest in more compost, more slug pellets and more seeds. Time has thus been spent raising seedlings in the greenhouse, and trying to spread the remaining compost on the heavy clay soil on what I term a 'vegetable patch'.

You can well imagine the time spent planting and watering since, and the pleasure in seeing things coming to fruition.

Alas, even during lockdown, my foes have been out to dine! A dahlia changed into a delicate network of spikes (emulated the following day by the normally resilient buddleia). A carefully planted out row of broccoli disappeared into mere stubs just above ground. My autumn raspberries, previously storming heavenward, were completely topped by rampant muntjac.

Worst of all my front garden, always much admired by my neighbours and visitors to Runrig Hill, has received the full muntjac treatment and instead of beautiful roses, only one or two buds escaped the attack. I do not appreciate the architectural effect of the bare bushes and must live in hopes of flowers to come!

**Christine Standing**

# Rector's Snapshot 1

'Have you enjoyed your four months off Tim? After all church has been closed and you are not allowed in school. It must have been great, especially with all the lovely weather in April and May.' Well, actually we have never worked harder: Covid-19 funerals, writing and livestreaming nine services a week, keeping our schools open and encouraging the hard pressed staff, comforting distraught brides, contacting the self-isolating and shielding elderly needing our care, anxiety everywhere over money and jobs, the pastoral load has been immense. 'Things can only get better.' I wonder.

## Rector's Snapshot 2

*"Back to normal now; churches can re-open I read. See you on Sunday Tim!"*  
Hang on, have you not seen the vast list of regulations the government has produced? How do you social distance in pews, how do you do and pay for a deep clean of a vast mediaeval building after each service, how do you socially distance boisterous young children and the vulnerable elderly, how do you conduct a wedding where bride and groom may not kiss their mums let alone each other, how do you have hymns when singing is not allowed? *"Oh, I hadn't thought of that."*

*Rev'd Canon Tim Harper; Rector*

### Subterranean Covid Lockdown Blues

*(to the tune of "We'll Meet Again")*

We'll meet again, but meanwhile don't hold your breaths,  
For by then we'll all be spaced out on meths:  
Texts before noon won't get answered that soon,  
'Cos I'm on line playing blitz chess and pontoon.  
Until lunch, I drag around in my worn-out dressing gown,  
Taking then a short slumber to escape Judy's Zumba.  
Go out for a walk? Rather listen to a talk:  
Take a short ride? Rather sun myself outside.  
So why meet again?  
All we need is oxygen,  
And a gap of six foot ten,  
Between us all.

**Mike Consden**

# Lockdown Lowdown

When Edward asked me to pen a few words with my thoughts on this surreal world in which we all found ourselves living, it was as though one of my grandsons was calling from Auckland to ask "Grandpa, what did you do in the Great War against the Invisible Enemy and what was life like then?". My answer could have been the same answer that the Abbe Sieyes gave when asked what he had done during the French Revolution, namely, "*J'ai vecu*" (I survived) but life, even an enforced alternative life style, is as we all discovered so much more than simply surviving. We discovered, if we had any need to be reminded, how very fortunate we are to live in and around Amersham. There were the simple pleasures of going out walking in the Chesham Bois woods and the huge area

of woodlands from Hervines Park over to Hyde Heath with all the bluebells on display in the sunshine. Greeting at a distance friendly strangers, many with their children or dogs. Walking into a nearly deserted top Amersham had a dream like quality of being on a film set, seeing the town as never before. Walking past the station wondering when one would next be using a station used times without number over the years. The delight at finding that at least the Aladdin's Cave of Carrols was open even in wartime. The rewarding experience of getting together for the Society's talk on Metroland courtesy of the latest miracle of science known as Zoom. So many memories of a time like no other, all part of the rich tapestry of life.

**Martin Read**



Laurette and Martin Read

# The Flint Covered Walls of St Mary's Church Amersham

Article written by the Bucks Archaeological  
Society Expert on Historic Churches -  
**Michael Hardy**

I estimate that the 13th century rebuilding of Amersham's Norman church was the first of at least 15 major projects of rebuilding, expansion, restoration, and refurbishment that have been carried out over the last 800 years. For the last 400 years, St Mary's has undoubtedly been fortunate to have members of the Drake Family as Lords of the Manor and Patrons of the church, so it never deteriorated as badly as many churches did.

I think we can still see evidence of all the major projects of work, such as the tall lancet window of the Early English period in St Andrew's Chapel, from the 13th Century rebuilding. There are also many drawings of the church, particularly from the 18th and 19th centuries, which can give different interpretations of how the building looked. The most accurate evidence has to be from photographs.

Recently I was doing some research for the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society into a series of published photographs, taken in the early 1860s by an Aylesbury photographer, Charles May. They include an image of the south side of St

Mary's church which shows it all covered in stucco. I suspect this might be the earliest such photo, and Edward Copisarow asked me to bring it to your attention, so it is reproduced here, together with my equivalent modern image. The 1860 photo also shows the South Transept on its own, without the Organ Chamber added a few years later.



A photograph in Amersham Museum, dating from around 1880, also shows that most of the exterior of the church was covered in stucco. By that time, the new Organ Chamber, with the South and East walls of the Chancel, have all been faced with flints, which must have been done in 1870–1872. That phase of work was done by the architect Frederick Preedy, who

dismantled Samuel Wyatt's furnishings, less than a century after they had been added.

Preedy's restoration saw the church closed for two years. The work included rebuilding both Nave Arcades, enlarging the Chancel Arch, adding the Organ Chamber and the wooden vault in the chancel, as well as his 12 feet high stone reredos behind the altar, now hidden.

Incidentally, the term stucco (a mixture of lime and sand) is generally used for exterior coatings, whereas a virtually identical mixture on an interior wall will be called plaster. It was in the late 19th century that Portland cement and sand started to be used for rendering exterior walls, and gypsum was used for interior plaster.

Frederick Preedy returned to Amersham in the 1880s, to restore the tower, and remove the stucco from all the exterior walls, re-facing them with knapped flints, mainly in a random pattern, with stone dressings. The flintwork of the tower is different as it incorporates some random pieces of stone.

Apparently, many of the flints came from the excavations for building the railway towards Wendover which opened in 1892. That was undoubtedly helpful, because of the vast number of flints used to clad St Mary's church. I have done some rough estimates, which have shown me there must be in excess of 300,000 flints facing the walls of St Mary's.

As well as being an architect, Frederick Preedy also designed and made stained glass windows himself. Amersham has seven of his windows, mainly from the 1880s, with one hidden behind the organ, and I would like to write about them for you in the future.

**Michael G Hardy**

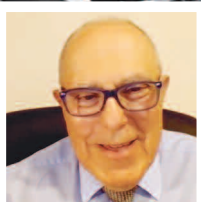
[www.buckschurches.uk](http://www.buckschurches.uk)





# Black Propaganda Radio

By Michael Kushner



It was a warm sunny evening, at the end of May, when members of the Amersham Society huddled, either individually or in pairs, around their iPads, laptops or computers, much as they might have done with radios in WWII, in readiness for a presentation on clandestine radio broadcasting during the second world war.

Black Propaganda Radio by Michael Kushner revealed the little known story of Signals Intelligence during the war. At the start of the war there were circa 25 radio stations broadcasting to the enemy. Quality of the programmes was poor both in presentation and material.

The Nazis recognised the potential value of radio broadcasts with the transmission of programmes by Lord Haw Haw (William Joyce) under the direction of Goebbels, the Reich Minister of Propaganda.

**There are three levels of propaganda:**

**White propaganda** does not hide its origin or seek to disguise its purpose.

**Grey propaganda** is where the origin is not directly confirmed and the source of the information is unclear.

**Black propaganda** is propaganda that seeks to create the impression that it was created by those it is seeking to

influence. Black propaganda if it is successful is ultimately a hoax.

At the start of the war the management of any form of propaganda was a complete shambles. However, by the end of the war this country was a world leader with numerous examples of misinformation being taken as fact at all levels of the Nazi party and throughout Europe.

At the start of the second world war Harold Robbins, previously Chief Engineer of PHILCO Radios, was recruited by Section VIII (the communications section) of MI6 based at Whaddon Hall a few miles west of Bletchley Park. Whilst the primary purpose was to transmit information from Bletchley Park to field commanders, MI6 established a small propaganda radio station.

The Government was keen to have broadcast propaganda under "one roof" and they created a department called Department EH because it was housed in Room 207 of Electra House a Cable & Wireless building on the Embankment. However, the fear of being bombed resulted in Department EH being rehoused, through Russell family connections, in the converted Riding Stables of the Duke of Bedford's ancestral home at Woburn Abbey.

Hugh Dalton, Minister of Economic Warfare, was asked by Churchill to set up an organisation to be involved with subversion, sabotage, assassinations and arming resistance groups. The resulting organisation was Special Operations Executive (SOE). SO1 was the propa-

ganda department of SOE. But there were three departments involved in propaganda all doing the same job, Section D (MI6), Ministry of Information Section R and Department EH. The result of the merger was the Political Warfare Executive which came into being on the 9 October 1941 based at Woburn Abbey.

Dennis Sefton Delmer was born in Germany of Australian parents. In 1917, when Dennis was 13, the family moved to the UK. He completed his education at St Pauls School in London and then Lincoln College Oxford where he studied modern languages. On leaving University he became the German correspondent for the Daily Express newspaper and in 1932 returned to Germany to follow Hitler and his campaign for election and ultimately control of Germany. By 1939 Delmer was back in the UK and was recruited by the BBC External services to broadcast a programme on Friday afternoons on the German language service. This was not a propaganda programme but a factual broadcast in German on the World Service. The first broadcast was to be on Friday 19 July 1940 which coincided with Hitler's Last Appeal to Britain. As it was a Friday, Ministers were away from London and without any guidance, Delmer decided to respond to Hitler in his broadcast to Germany. Delmer's response was not very polite and it caused a major storm in the Government. The Germans were none too pleased either and Delmer was listed as a wanted man by the Gestapo.

Delmer was sent by MI6 to Lisbon. Portugal was an alleged neutral during the war and Delmer was asked, as a Daily Express correspondent, to question visiting Germans and refugees about events within war torn Europe. He had barely settled in Lisbon when he was requested to return and report to the Political Warfare Executive at Woburn Abbey. Having signed the official secrets act he was sent to Wavendon Towers in north Bucks where he was to set up a Research Unit, an RU which was to be a cover for a propaganda Radio Station. Houses were requisitioned in the area for the studio engineers, production staff and script writers. Who were the script writers? German refugees and Jews who had escaped as the Nazis power base grew. People known to Delmer.

Delmer was of the opinion that propaganda radio was being aimed at the wrong people. There was no point trying to change the behaviour and minds of the ruling elite. The messages should be targeted at those suffering and experiencing the difficulties brought on by the war. Delmer's new concept was to reach out to the "ordinary" people. His plan called for denouncing the Nazis but continued support of Germany and indirectly Hitler. The voice of the new station would be Peter Secklemann. He was given a new name Paul Saunders and was to be known as "Der Chef", a term used to refer to Hitler by those close to him, albeit not in his presence. Officially the station was to be called RU G3 but Delmer called it

GS1 which stood for Gustav Siegfried Eins which did not mean anything but Delmer thought it sounded like a radio station. The programmes were recorded on to 18" glass discs, made by RCA, which ran for about 10 minutes. Unlike a gramophone record the needle played from the centre out so when it comes to an end the needle drops off the disc. Consequently it sounds like a live broadcast because there is no "click click" of a needle at the end of a disc. On 23 April 1941 the station was ready, complete with signature tune.

Rudolph Hess absconded to Britain on 10 May 1941 and was immediately arrested. GS1 made up a completely fictional story as to how he came to Britain and who had helped him, albeit with real names. Two weeks later Delmer was to learn from contacts in Germany that some of the people named in the broadcast had been questioned by the Gestapo. Clearly the message was getting through. Delmer was seeking to show the Nazis were corrupt, involved in drugs and money laundering, moving money from Germany to Switzerland, anything that could be seen as disadvantaging the "normal" German citizen.

On one occasion GS1 reported there would be a secret meeting at the Union Cinema but did not report at which one. There were numerous Union Cinemas throughout Germany which caused the Gestapo much wasted effort. The station also read out listeners' letters as well as appearing to have other stations such as GS18 joining them for special events. All

of which were false but added to the credibility of the broadcast and the radio station.

The German authorities meanwhile were becoming concerned and put out leaflets saying not to trust radio reports. GS1 broadcast their agreement with the official notices and said citizens should only listen to official stations such as GS1.

Delmer also received information from the US Embassy in Berlin, the USA was not in the war at this stage, that there was an anti Nazi radio station broadcasting within Berlin which gave further endorsement of the impact of GS1.

GS1 was operational for about 2 years but by October 1943 it was time for it to close down. Delmer's station had always claimed that the Gestapo was after them. Delmer decided to go out as a result of a Gestapo raid. Thus GS1 went off the air with the sound of a smashed door and gun shots.

In Germany there was real concern about people listening to non state radio broadcasts. People were forbidden to listen to short wave radios and enemy stations. The authorities introduced a medium wave radio known as the People's Radio on which they could listen to the Führer's messages and government broadcasts.

The ban on listening to foreign radio stations broadcasting shortwave radio presented a problem for those wishing to use radio as a vehicle for propaganda. As previously noted at the start of the

war Harold Robbins, previously Chief Engineer of PHILCO Radios, had been recruited by MI6. He learnt, through contacts with RCA in America, of a very high power medium wave band transmitter that had been built but was no longer required by their customer. Harold Robbins travelled to the USA, acquired the transmitter and had it upgraded to 600kilowatts. The very powerful transmitter was shipped to the UK and as part of Project Aspidistra it was installed at Kings Standon near Crowborough, Sussex.

Once installed the transmitter was powerful enough to deliver medium wave radio programmes directly to the People's Radio in Germany. Whilst the transmitter was situated in Sussex the programmes would be made in Bedfordshire at Milton Bryan where a two studio block had been purpose built for the stations proposed by Delmer. One station would be targeted at off duty U-Boat crews based in France, to be known as Atlantiksender, and the other station was to be focused on the German Army Panzer divisions, to be known as Soldatensender. The programmes would be written by a team of scriptwriters based on information from prisoners of war and other sources. The studio also had its own Oompah Band which comprised Afrika Korps soldiers captured in the North Africa campaign and held in a POW camp in Bedfordshire.

Before the war the Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro, a German Press Association bureau, was based in Fleet Street. When

war broke out the staff left for Germany but it is little known that they left behind all their paper work and equipment part of which was a *hellschreiber*, an early radio teleprinter/fax machine and this continued to function receiving any information released by the Nazis to the Press Association. Information supplied was news and weather, sports results, news of bombing raids and affected areas / streets, military awards, areas affected by typhoid, names of military personnel killed in action together with the latest directives issued by the Nazis. The result was that Delmer's propaganda unit was receiving this information at the same time as the German radio stations which endorsed its credibility.

One other use for which the *Aspidistra* was ideally suited was intrusion operations. One particular operation was known as *Big Bertha* and involved rebroadcasting German radio programmes back to Germany. As the war progressed and the air raids into Germany increased the German Authorities believed that the allied bombers were using the German radio powerful medium wave transmitters as beacons so they would switch off the transmitters in the north of the country at night. This meant that the German National radio listeners would abruptly lose the radio broadcast. The British Authorities decided to use the big aerials of *Aspidistra* to pick up the German National Radio signal, boost the signal and retransmit it back using the *Aspidistra* transmitter. Why would you do this? What is the

point? Well the German population knew their programmes, knew their presenters, knew their music and when the news came on the German state news would be faded out and "doctored" news reports broadcast in its place.

On 14 November 1943 at 8:00pm the *Aspidistra* transmitter broadcast for the first time on the medium wave band 360/410/492 metres and continued until on 30 April 1945 when the station abruptly shut down with the end of the war in Europe. The *Aspidistra* transmitter continued in use for a short while, after the war, by the Diplomatic wireless service and the BBC World Service continued to use it until 1982.

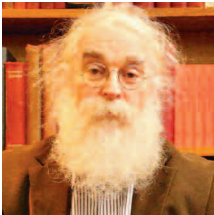
As the war came to an end Dennis Sefton Delmer went back to work for the *Daily Express* as its Foreign Editor and authored two books on his prewar and war time experiences. He died at the age of 75 in 1979.

So concluded an enlightening presentation during the course of which many little known facts were revealed. The UK may have started the war on the back foot but by the end of the war the thousands of people who listened to propaganda radio believed what was being broadcast. The German radio monitors knew where the broadcasts were coming from but they could do little about it because of the powerful *Aspidistra* transmitter.

D-Day may have been the UK's biggest deception but *Black Propaganda Radio* was Britain's biggest hoax.

*Article by John Suckling*

Because of the continuing lockdown, the Amersham Society Committee put together a special extra season of monthly Zoom talks to tide us over what would normally have been the summer break. Three distinguished collectors of works on paper (of three very different sorts) agreed to step in at short notice and first up, for the last Wednesday in June, was Irving Finkel. This wasn't just a first for us – it was Irving's first time on Zoom too but the Society's Tech Whizz, Lena Morgan, had him fully rehearsed and ready to go on the night.



# The Man Who Saves Lives

**DR IRVING FINKEL** is best known as the British Museum's expert on ancient Babylon. An outstanding philologist, he is one of only a handful of people in the country who can read the Museum's 30,000 clay tablets, each inscribed by tiny pointy sticks with minute cuneiform script. His astonishing ability to communicate his discoveries in works such as *"The Ark Before Noah"* have seen his books in the bestseller lists and many of his Youtube talks attracting millions of views. But he is also the sort of doctor who can save lives, lives recorded in manuscript and which, were it not for his Great Diary Project, would surely be lost forever.

The Great Diary Project began, unsurprisingly, with a diary. That of a soldier by the name of Godfrey Williams. A bookdealer friend of Irving's had offered this 78 volume account of one life to the

Imperial War Museum and was frustrated when they said they were only interested in the years 1914–1918 and 1939–1945. On a whim, Irving bought the lot, with no idea of the voyage on which this one purchase was to see him sally forth. The diaries started in Godfrey Williams' schooldays – an early volume inscribed *"Private. Private. Private."* and at the front, *"Take notice all persons! Anyone who looks at this diary without my permission is a Beastly Sneak."* Beastly Sneak that he was, Irving read the whole 78 volumes, from school career in the 1880s to army training, getting married, time in India, getting married for the second time and carrying on until the 1950s when he was a respected JP and he died. The thought that this continuous story of one life could so easily have been lost forever was too much!

Diaries, our speaker declared, amongst the literate English, start out as a confessional but as time went by they were used to record when and where family events happened. Manuscript diaries are not just old engagement tablets, they are the most marvellous historical resource, each giving great insight into the ordinary lives and doings of their own epoch. Shockingly though, these wonderful diaries of the dead become a liability - first consigned to the loft or garage but in the end, to destruction.

***“The skip seems to me to have been invented by nature especially for the murder of diaries”***

Irving was drawn to conclude that, unless SOMETHING was done, manuscript diaries were all DOOMED. All the diaries in all the houses of Great Britain and the lives recorded therein would be lost forever. And so the building of a collection became a passion. Bookfairs were rummaged, eBay was trawled and old people accosted in the street until, having got together 800 or 900 and, what with being a curator, he started to wonder why... and realised his job was not to COLLECT but to RESCUE diaries and to find their forever home.

After trying every university library in the land only to be told, *“You don’t expect us to take diaries which aren’t anything to do with us?”*, Irving was on the lookout for a disused lighthouse

into which he might just throw all the diaries he had collected for someone else to deal with, when the Archivist at the Bishopsgate Institute sent the one positive response. Located just behind Liverpool Street Station, this extraordinary archive of ‘the ordinary man’ had both the enthusiasm and...the space! A no-discrimination-all-embracing accession policy whereby nothing was to be refused was quickly agreed and a partnership struck up with Dr Polly North (who, our speaker explained, does all the work) and the collection in earnest began. Catching people at the very moment when they have almost but not quite yet decided to get rid of the diaries is the key to securing them for the collection which now has more than 11,000 diaries. *“It is the only library in the world where we take everything and promise to look after it forever and ever!”* Irving declared proudly. It is also very accessible: Polly devised the cataloguing system and makes an entry on the website after which new accessions become available to the public. The only restriction a donor may make is to keep donations sealed for an agreed number of years before anyone is allowed to open them.

Armed with premises, the Great Diary Project clearly needed a letterhead and, as no writing paper was complete without Patrons, Michael Palin and Stephen Fry supplied the want and both have shown every bit as much interest in the Project as you would expect from their on-screen personas.

It turned out that Irving was not the first person to have this idea. Back in the 1930s, a second hand bookseller in Wigan called Edward Hall had bought a box of books containing some mid-19th century diaries written by a woman who ran away from a husband who had beaten her. Hall was fascinated and collected many more 19th century diaries written by curates and the like and illustrated with watercolours and his archive is preserved in Wigan. But no additions have been made to the collection since Hall's death, whereas The Great Diary Project will continue to accept for as long as contributions are forthcoming.

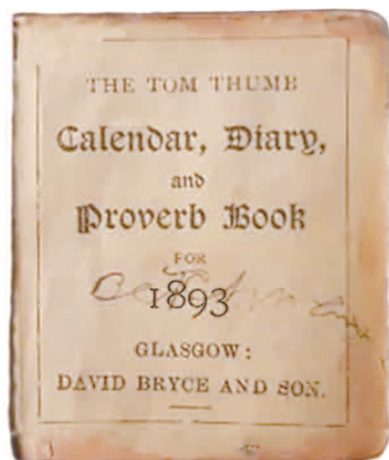
And so, we carried on for over an hour as Irving regaled us with more of his adventures in building this archive crammed full of people's lives, all so carefully noted by thinking persons.

Some months after an appearance on the BBC World Service (you can get from the British Museum to Bush House and back in a lunch hour) to promote the Great Diary Project, Irving received a parcel at the Museum wrapped in a piece of brown paper tied up with string. Dan Deadman from



Western Australia wrote simply, *"Please find enclosed a diary you may find interesting"*. It was from 1876, the diary of one Thomas Walker, an Englishman who lived from 1858 to 1932. Walker

was a hypnotist who conducted seances in America and performed experiments with mercury. After one such performance with mercury, during which he used a small boy from the audience as his assistant, the boy died and Walker was exposed as a fraud and forced to flee to Australia where he rose to become Attorney General under the premiership of his friend, Alfred Deakin. Deakin had himself been a medium and psychic in his youth before he became prime minister.



Irving's favourite diary (for which he bid on eBay *"an obscene amount of money"*) is his Tom Thumb Calendar Diary and Proverb Book from 1893.

A chance re-reading of *The Borrowers* by Mary Norton, reminded him that Arietti's diary was called a Tom Thumb Diary and had quotations used as chapter headings. A bit of research revealed that the firm of David Bryce in Scotland had actually made just such Tom Thumb diaries for real: one HAD to be added to the collection.

*Good girls keep diaries  
and bad girls  
don't have the time*

We were lead down another mouse-hole to discuss Diary Pencils. Hodder and Stoughton are keen for Irving to write a book about the Great Diary Project (to be called, *"Beastly Sneaks"*) and he had in mind a satirical chapter with a spoof typology of diary pencils. But being a curator, he noticed that they DO fall into clear and distinct categories. They need to be thin and the ferrule must stop them disappearing down the spine, and they mustn't be confused with dance pencils, bridge pencils or those tied to progressive whist tally cards, each of which is of an entirely different character. Whilst two hole pencil sharpeners were familiar to us all, it remained, until recently, a mystery why you can't buy a pencil sharpener narrow enough for a diary pencil. Even the Paul A Johnson Pencil Sharpener Museum in Ohio (to which Irving had written on his British Museum notepaper and received a reply from Paul A Johnson in person) didn't have one. But exhaustive research had recently brought to light the *"Peerless Combined Pencil and Sharpener"* by diary manufacturers Charles Letts.

With the advent of computers and blogs and social media, diary writing has dropped out of fashion, the supply is dwindling and the clock is now ticking for extant diaries to be saved. Blogs are written for other people to read: diaries are not. Diaries are the only genre of



writing where the author tells the truth as the author sees it. Unless they are written by politicians with a view to publication ... which is why no diaries of politicians are allowed into the collection.

But there is a limit to what can be bought - the trouble with buying diaries on eBay is that people only list diaries there that they think people will want to buy. The Great Diary Project concerns itself with those diaries that have no buyer. So a website has been set up which is there for everyone who is looking for a home for the diaries they have inherited.

A BBC radio programme about the Project, *"The Man Who Saves Lives"*, has been broadcast several times and brings

people to the website and their diaries to the Archive. But more than this Irving, like Sherlock Holmes, has his own team of *"Baker Street Irregulars"*. One such irregular is the partner of a young woman who worked for Irving's publisher. He was unemployed and out, looking for work, when he spotted some diaries in a skip. A man came out of the house and gruffly declared, *"If you want that stuff, you take it!"*. Irving acquired the batch of 12 diaries which dated from 1834 – 1835.

The extraordinary thing about these diaries is that they were written in code, a code which was previously unknown. Much time invested in Bletchley Park style codebreaking - three words transcribed in feint pencil by a hand unknown provided the clue and the code was cracked! The diarist was a curate in Gloucestershire with the family name of Cliff. His diary contained a watercolour portrait of his mother by his sister. On googling the sister's name plus the word 'painter', Irving discovered that the Cliffs lived a mere pony trap ride from Elizabeth Barrett who had engaged the sister to paint her portrait. Elizabeth Barrett's diary on the matter being very rude about the portrait, saying she will have her nose and chin redone, before going on to be rude about the whole Cliff family. For a diary connoisseur like Irving, it is most especially delicious to read the diaries of the curate and poet side by side – telling as they do, two halves of the same story.

Even the most routine diaries are

vital – one kept throughout the 1930s and 40s by a woman in Shepherds Bush has not one mention of the war: no bombs, no deaths no shortages – just what she was doing and thinking.

We ended our tour of the collection with a favourite diary at the Bishopsgate Institute. It dates from the 1960s, bound in blue plastic with a lock which, *"a blind man could open with a limp piece of spaghetti"*. It has bus tickets, stubs for The Who concerts and adverts for make-up cut out of magazines and tucked in. Columns had been drawn in at the back to form a grid in which the girl who had written it listed boys and scored their abilities as kissers. In 300 years time it will tell historians that people never change: imagine if we had thousands of diaries today from the time of Shakespeare... and that is the real reason for saving this stuff forever.

The talk concluded with the audience enrolled as honorary members of Irving's Baker Street Irregulars, exhorted to keep our eyes peeled and to enlist as many others as possible in the effort to secure more diaries for the Bishopsgate Institute, there to be preserved forever.

A lively session of questions and discussion followed, briefly touching on the Museum of Broken Relationships in Zagreb before reaching a climax as one member of the Society returned from their desk and was able to hold up for all to see, their Bauhaus pencil sharpener, which had been designed specifically to take pencils of a 5mm diameter.

**Report by Edward Copisarow**

# Portrait of a Gentleman

## John Lawrence

Article written by Rob Michael

As a young boy growing up in Ireland, I unwittingly had a daily glimpse into the wig-wearing mores of 18th Century England. The vehicle for this snapshot of Georgian life was none other than the painting you see before you – A Portrait of a Gentleman, John Lawrence.

On the landing outside my bedroom, this painting stood guard. From his sentinel spot high on the wall he hung from, he silently greeted me as I headed for breakfast before I left for school in the morning. Mr John Lawrence, I would ask, do you prefer Weetabix or porridge? My reply was consistently, a smiling silence.

When I returned in the evenings after many hours of running with a muddy rugby ball cuddled in my arms, John Lawrence was still on guard. Still silent and still in seemingly good spirits.

And so it has continued in the years since. John Lawrence has travelled with me on my journey from those days and has been an ever present, silent observer of the varying ebbs and flows of life. Never judging, always well dressed and like a true gentleman, perhaps kissing, but never telling.

I freely admit that during my younger, formative years, this painting of John Lawrence, splendidly poised in tumbling tresses of fabulous follicles, struck me as being a Georgian-period themed tribute to Brian May, lead guitarist of the rock band Queen. Instead, it was a tribute of a

different sort, to a man from a different time. However, while I soon learned who this John Lawrence of my childhood was not - he was not, Brian May - who he was, remained somewhat of a blank canvas. He kept his silence. However, that changed quite recently and with the extra time gifted by a Coronavirus lockdown, I began to peer behind the veil to seek answers John Lawrence had been happy to keep to himself. A few emails, some more internet searches later, a cold case investigation team emerged out of the ether: Edward Copisarow, Barney Tyrwhitt Drake, Steve Cope and Alison Bailey. Indeed much of what follows is the fruit of their labours. These generous, insightful and thoroughly splendid souls, added brushstrokes of colour and detail, details which are not yet complete, but which hopefully will create a full portrait of one gentleman, John Lawrence.

### Who was John Lawrence?

John Lawrence is our starting point, courtesy of an inscription on the painting, which states that he was born in 1700. It also suggests a link with the Tyrwhitt Drake family, through his granddaughter, born Ann Wickham who married Thomas Tyrwhitt Drake, MP. From that piece of information, we can sketch a line between John Lawrence and the present day, starting from when John Lawrence was born in 1700 to today, in the person of Barney Tyrwhitt Drake, historian and



genealogist. Mr Tyrwhitt Drake emerged as a direct descendant of the Drakes of Shardeloes and great-grandson, four times removed of John Lawrence's granddaughter!

The Drakes of Shardeloes need little introduction, both their presence in Amersham and parliamentary history have left a lasting impression on Buckinghamshire and the United Kingdom.

### **When was the portrait painted and why?**

All good detective work often requires utilising the most obvious clues. For example, the sitter's attire and certainly his

fabulous wig, suggest a background and financial status worthy of the title 'Gentleman'. Additionally, the sitter appears to be aged somewhere in his late 20s or early 30s.

Such visual clues are echoed in some relevant historical facts. John Lawrence Senior took possession of the lease for the Amersham Brewery at the age of 28, in 1728. Also, Amersham Parish Registers, reveal that John Lawrence Senior had a daughter, Ann Lawrence who married a William Wickham of Garsington at St Mary's, Amersham on 24th March 1754. When John Lawrence's daughter passed

away on 2nd February 1808, she was laid to rest in St Mary's Garsington, Oxfordshire. Her memorial states that she was the daughter of John Lawrence of Amersham and that she had been born 83 years previously, in circa 1725.

Taking those clues together, one can suggest that the painting was commissioned sometime after the mid-1720s. After all, becoming a new father and new owner of Amersham Brewery would certainly have provided a legitimate reason to have a portrait of oneself as a young gentleman.

On a side note, the wig John Lawrence Senior is sporting, undoubtedly would have denoted a level of social standing. By the 1720s, the wearing of such perukes, particularly after royal patronage, had become essential for men of social rank. Here, one can reference William Hogarth's 'The Five Orders of Periwigs' from 1761. This was an engraving that satirically made comment on how wigs had essentially become advertising billboards for one's rank and status.

Such wigs were originally a functional tool to hide baldness that was either genetically gifted or required to avoid head lice, the latter of which being a scourge that proved itself to be a very talented social climber. Indeed, the presence of head lice from the poorest to the richest suggested that amid the class divides of the 1700s there was at least one area where classes enjoyed equality, namely poor hair hygiene.

What do we know of John Lawrence Senior and his place in Amersham History?

The eager reader will note that the John Lawrence in the painting has been

named 'Senior'. This did provide some confusion during research, for while John Lawrence Senior bought the lease for Amersham Brewery in 1728, he died in 1764. However, eleven years later and three days before Christmas Day, 1775, a John Lawrence sold a storehouse to William Weller, of the Weller Brewery family. It was to form the basis of the Weller families subsequent retail fortunes.

The explanation for the second John Lawrence of 1775, is not a Lazarus-like resurrection in which John Lawrence the gentleman brewer who died in 1764, rose from the dead. Admittedly, given the role of rising yeast in the beer-making process, such a rising could well have been an unrivalled marketing opportunity for this brewer.

The truth, however, is less dramatic as John Lawrence Senior had a son, John Lawrence Junior. One of the earliest listings of the gentry in Amersham is the Universal British Directory compiled between 1793 and 1798. The Amersham listings in volume 2, page 45 include John Lawrence Junior in the gentry section as John Lawrence, Esq.

From the latter's will, proved on 9th December 1802 in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, we learn that he was described as a 'Gentleman' of Amersham, rather than simply a brewer. Indeed, when Junior died in 1802, not only had the fashion of wig-wearing almost died out thanks to Sir Robert Walpole's 1795 Tax on Hair Powder but so too had the Lawrence's direct involvement in the brewery trade.

However, the legacy of John Lawrence in Amersham history did not finish with the sale in 1775. The will of 1802 was proved

by the two grandsons-in-law of John Lawrence Senior. The first being Thomas Drake Tyrwhitt Drake (1749-1810) who married John Lawrence Senior's granddaughter, Ann Wickham on 8th August 1780 at St Georges Hanover Square in London. Ann Wickham's sister and co-heiress, Mary Wickham, married John Lawrence's second grandson in law, the Rev. John Drake who was Rector of Amersham from 1775 to his death in 1826. The Reverend, was also a pluralist and Vicar of St Nicholas, Deptford, Kent, where the Wickhams were major landowners.

So to recap, John Lawrence Senior had two daughters and a son. One of his daughters Ann, married and became Ann Wickham. Her daughter Ann married Thomas Drake Tyrwhitt Drake and has a surviving memorial inscription in the Drake Chapel at St Mary's in Amersham which states that she was born on 14 July 1762 and died on 13 October 1845.

Be that as it may, what the above means is that John Lawrence Senior, has a place in Amersham history and his portrait at one point may well have hung on the walls of the beautiful Shardeloes House.

### Mysteries Unsolved

And it is to this aspect of the John Lawrence story where mystery still exists. The Drake family eventually left Shardeloes and some items from their family collection set off on their own journeys via private sales and auctions. One such item is presumably the painting of John Lawrence, which landed in Dublin in the early 1980s. In 1982 it became part of my family, being purchased from a leading Dublin antique dealer of the time.

A key question that does remain, aside

from the fascinating mystery as to how this painting made its journey from Amersham to Dublin, is the identity of the painter.

The Aylesbury Archives contain fascinating material on Shardeloes, including commentary on the paintings contained therein. Those files show that there were a large number of portraits by Thomas Hudson, which shared walls with works by George Jamesone, Claude Joseph Vernet and Cornelius Johnson.

However, perhaps the identity of the painter of the John Lawrence Senior portrait might be found within the Royal Academy of Arts, where a tantalizingly similar portrait is to be found: Portrait of a Man, possibly Lord Burlington, 1680-1720, attributed to Jacques Parmentier (1658 - 1730) and William Kent (1685-1748).

After polite persuasion, John Lawrence has broken his silence and finally revealed some of his secrets. During the time he was alive the right to silence had become enshrined in English law, a right encapsulated in the legal maxim (and Latin tongue-twister) *Nemo Tenetur Se Ipsum Accusare*.

So, it is to be expected that further questions may be met with John Lawrence's silence. Discovering his preferred breakfast cereal or indeed what exactly was underneath his wig, will most likely remain a mystery.

However, his contribution to Amersham and the identity of the painter who captured the youth of this gentleman remain questions that readers are more than welcome to assist with.

The investigation continues.

**Article by Rob Michael**

# But Do You Actually Read Them?



## Report on a talk by Anthony Davis

This second in the series of three lectures on collecting was tailor-made for a zoom meeting as the technology enabled the whole audience to see clearly the intricate detail involved in all the book bindings shown during this excellent presentation. This was done through the use of a camera spot-light on to the books themselves.

Anthony Davis started by providing a background to the habit of collecting things, mainly a male basic instinct he compared to sex and the chase, before going on to analysing the characteristics of collectors partners whether WAGS, help-mates, saints or even the disinterested.

He then proceeded to explain how book bindings were made. The basic product used was goatskin, which was the hardest wearing skin, on to which was created a series of designs by pressing, with a variety of tools, gold leaf into the goatskin, so creating the desired pattern or design, in many cases a coat of arms or appropriate motif.

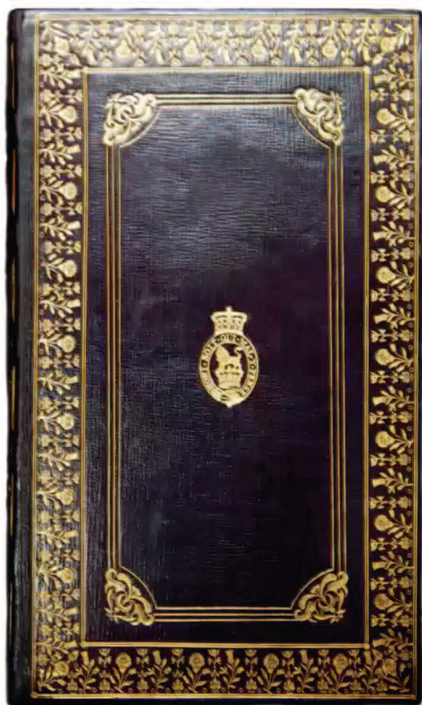
From 17th century illustrations of bookbinding he pointed out the tools in use then and explained these were the



same as those used by book binders today. Up until the 1840's all book bindings were handmade.

Moving on to collecting fine bindings, Anthony identified there were two key eras for fine bindings. The first was the Restoration period from 1660 - 1700 when the Stuart monarchs encouraged European artists and craftsmen of all trades to come over to the court in London.

In describing examples from this time among the books from his magnificent collection he showed one, a contemporary account of the journey of Charles II from his defeat at the battle of Worcester to his escape to France from the south coast six weeks later; a second



**James Gilchrist,**  
A Brief Display  
of the Origin and  
History of Ordeals,  
**London 1821**



**Jonas Hanway,**  
Solitude in Imprisonment,  
**London 1776**

< **Armand de Rancé**  
Traité Abrégé des  
Obligations des Chrétiens,  
**Paris 1699**

dating from 1680 that was the anthem book for the Royal Household Chapel Royal that listed Mr Purcell as one of the choristers; and a third, a French book with James II's Royal Crest of Arms that omitted the French lilies from the crest because James II was living in exile in the French Court and it was inappropriate to embarrass his host with the ongoing claim over Calais.

The Regency era was as important a period for fine bindings as a result of the flight of many skilled book binders, and other craftsmen, from Napoleonic Europe to England. From this period, Anthony showed examples of bindings with Royal initials and crests on the front (identifying GP for the Prince Regent George IV, EY for Edward, the Duke of York, and Geo

III, for King George III). The last example he showed was a parchment binding book with painted cameos on each of the front and back covers that was bought by the leading bookbinder of the time, James Edwards, who outbid George III as Queen Caroline had announced £200 was far too much to pay for a book.

At the conclusion of this most informative presentation, Anthony answered the title's opening question by explaining that, historically, fine bindings were mostly to be found on books that people treasured. As a consequence he had numerous bibles and books of common prayer, as well as some 14 copies of the poems of William Cowper and other multiple such books.

**Report by Mark Ladd**

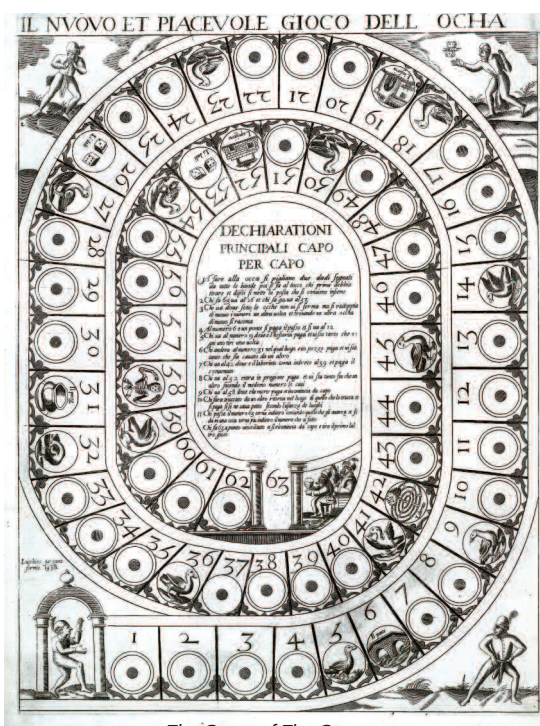
# Printed Board Games Both Real and Imagined

Report on the talk by Professor Adrian Seville

The grand finale of our bonus summer season of Zoom talks by collectors of works on paper was given on 26th August by Prof Adrian Seville. For over 50 years Adrian has collected printed board games dating from the 17th century to the 21st with a particular interest in the Game of The Goose – a spiral race game introduced in Italy in the late 15th Century as a gambling recreation for the elite and subsequently adopted and adapted across much of Europe as a standard basis for board games. With each iteration, the themes were tailored to their own moment in history and we were to look at some games which had used current affairs and history as their themes.

After introducing us to the basic form of the game, illustrated by a rather fine Italian specimen dating from 1598 and now in the British Museum, the typical rules were explained: progress was simply by roll of the die with no choice of move (a long way removed from mind games like chess); landing on a cell such as the prison would result in the player having to wait until another player lands on the same cell in order to release him; other pitfalls included having to miss a turn or pay into the pool. Cells depicting geese are favourable and allowed the player landing on them to advance faster.

We were then transported to the 1630s and France, a game based on the Goose but with each playing space depicting a point in history. Major events in the Old Testament were depicted in the earlier cells – landing on the birth of Noah



The Game of The Goose

resulting in moving forward six centuries to the cell depicting the Deluge and the Ark which Noah built when he was 600 years old. Land on "Servitude in Egypt" and miss two turns; arrive at Solomon's Temple to collect one stake from each player.



Other historical games followed. We stopped to compare two games concerning the events of the French Revolution, published at the time, they recorded gruesome stories of the day with the politically correct interpretation that was necessary at the time. We crossed the Channel next to the earliest English example of an historical printed board game dating from the early nineteenth century, *"Universal History and Chronology"*. Fully up to date at the time, with George, Prince Regent in the final cell, this game was accompanied by a booklet offering explanations to be read aloud as the square is landed upon. We landed on the year 1509, according to the booklet this was the year that *"gardening was introduced to England from the Netherlands, whence vegetables*

*used to be imported"*. Adrian's research discovered the veracity of this long lost snippet of history: an obscure publication of 1717 explained that prior to Henry VIII's marriage to Catherine of Aragon, *"England had no sort of salleting grew here, nor any Carrots, Cabbage or Turnips or such eatable Roots but such Roots were sent us from Holland or Flanders"*, so the King had sent for a gardener from Holland to grow here the salad Her Majesty could eat for her dinner.

*"Le Jeu de la Victoire"*, published in Paris in 1919 purported to be an account of the steady French progress to victory. The importance of minor victories was exaggerated and great setbacks were down-played. Adrian picked out several of the illustrated cells to share the victor's impressions of the Germans - internment

camps in Lower Saxony, the execution of Edith Cavell and the cutting down of the French fruit trees by the Boche. America's arrival in the war is attributed to the sinking of the Lusitania – the two year gap between these events conveniently overlooked by the partisan authors, keen that their view of history prevail.

We concluded with two more modern games, the first from 1953 was produced by Paris Match and depicted the Coronation of the Queen, Princess Margaret and Peter Townsend and, in the traditional labyrinth square, *"The Burgess and Maclean affair"*. The final game was a pure piece of propaganda, a Dutch political game from 2012, *"from their Brussels to our Netherlands"*. It was issued by a daily newspaper, the cells carried slogans such as *"Netherlands out of the EU"*, *"Our own immigration"*, *"Boss in our own land"* and *"Our own Currency"*,

all supporting the electoral campaign of the far-right politician Geert Wilders.

And so our canter from July 1465 through historical and political variants of the Game of the Goose to August 2012 came to a conclusion. History was told, as the authors saw it or at least as they imagined it.

A lively question and answer session followed, Peter Borrows asked about the numerology of the game, Annie Hamilton Pike about the playing pieces – these and further questions from Tony Westhead and Martin Read were all answered with fulsome scholarship and good humour. Dorothy Symes brought proceedings to a close with a gracious vote of thanks which was met with thumbs-up from an audience which had been both educated and entertained.

**Report by Edward Copisarow**



# River Misbourne Survey Report

Dated 26th August 2020  
for Amersham Society Committee

**Started Wednesday 26th August  
10am Weather sunny.**

*Survey carried out by*

**Tim Harmer and Lesley Harmer**

**Area of survey is from the bottom  
end of Shardeloes Lake to the old  
Lookers Garage.**

**1** Grill from lake looks clear. However new barbed wire fence fitted along the public foot path gives no clear access. Tree branches and a large amount of weed in the river behind the Cricket Club but the river is running well.

**2** Between Shardeloes Drive and Amersham by-pass bridge and further along to Amersham High Street bridge. The odd tree branch in the river but it is running well and we saw small fish along this stretch.

**3** Copas Farm is private land, so unable to undertake survey. However from the High Street bridge heavy vegetation was seen in the river on this farm land.

**4** To Mill Lane. The river is locked behind gates giving very little visual access.

**5** The stretch of river immediately down-stream from Mill Lane to the corner of Barn Meadow. River running well and clean on one side but has thick vegetation on the cottages side of the river. Riparian owners need to clear.

**6** The Barn Meadow reach is clear and flowing well.

**7** We did not have access to the river between the culvert and Pondwick. At Pondwick the river has thick dead vegetation behind the alms houses and museum. This needs clearing by the riparian owners.

**8** At Badminton Court the river flowing well. But there is vegetation along this stretch.

**9** Church Mead. There is vegetation in the river but running OK.

**10** Car park area has dead branches in river. No supermarket trolleys found in the river. However, we removed three trolleys on the river bank and rubbish. There is always rubbish at the Tesco corner of the council car park.

**11** Behind Tesco supermarket rubbish in the river and an office chair.



Shopping trolley at Tesco side  
to Station Road bridge

**12** River running behind Tesco car park and overflow culvert all OK.

**13** At Station Road bridge the river is flowing. However on the Tesco and small farm side there is large amount of weed growing but the river is flowing through the vegetation. There is also a

Tesco trolley in the river. The Tesco and small farm area of the river needs clearing as this is a future block point.

**14** West arch of the road bridge to Ambers and river fork at the old Lookers Jaguar Garage also weed needs clearing but flowing OK.

**15** Area from Lookers Jaguar Garage needs a clean-up. From where the river emerges from the two arches under London Road West there is weed growth in the river.

**16** Moving along into Bury farm field the river has been cleared. This area is clear and running well. As the river has been cleared at this point we did not continue to the foot bridge. This will be undertaken at the next river walk.

**Tim Harmer**



Station Road bridge to Ambers

# Re-opening of Amersham Museum!

I was really pleased to be able to return to work, albeit part-time from the beginning of July. When I was not able to go to work I was reminded how broad a range of activities our small, but enterprising museum offers. I missed doing these things, but most of all I missed our brilliant team of volunteers. Some volunteers have been able to continue to help during the lockdown, with plants receiving the care they need in the garden and some of the 150+ interviews in our oral history collection succinctly summarised by other helpers. Several volunteers pursued research into local people, including me. I volunteered on our Age Friendly project, interviewing a lady in her 90s in Chesham. We conducted all of our interviews by What's app calls on our mobiles (with her daughter's help) and I was able to write up her life story. It was a privilege to talk to her and through her life story I learned more about wartime Amersham, Brazil's, Statter's, pre-fabs and local hospitals.



## Amersham Museum and Garden

Opening Times from 22nd August

**Saturdays & Sundays**  
12 noon to 4.30pm

Pre-booking required at [www.amershammuseum.org](http://www.amershammuseum.org)  
Admission £4.50 adults, free for children

Since returning to work I have been working hard, with the support of the trustees, to put all the necessary measures in place to make the museum safe for our volunteers and our visitors. We were delighted to re-open the museum to visitors towards the end of August. At the moment we are only open at weekends, 12 noon to 4.30pm. Adults £4.50, free for children, Friends and annual pass holders.

We introduced the following measures to keep our volunteers and visitors safe:

- Limited the number of people in the museum. We are asking visitors to pre-book their visit via our website.
- Ask that visitors observe social distancing and wear a face covering in the museum.
- Provided hand sanitisers for use on entry and throughout the building.
- Installed a screen at reception and provided face coverings for our volunteers.
- Ask that visitors pay by contactless or by card.
- Introduced a new cleaning regime.

- Removed interactive exhibits and the contents of our discovery boxes.
- Trained our volunteers in the new procedures.

Although we have had to remove some interactives that children enjoyed playing with, we are offering all children visiting the museum a free trail sheet instead.

We also offer the opportunity to visit the museum when no one else is there; we continue to welcome pre-arranged groups outside normal museum opening hours, during the day or in the evening. If you're interested just contact me: [emily@amershammuseum.org](mailto:emily@amershammuseum.org)

## Join a Guided Walk!

Our popular programme of guided walks also resumed in August. Tudor walks will take place every Saturday until the end of September and town walks every Sunday until the end of October.

£5 for adults, free for children and Friends.

For both walks pre-booking via our website is essential. Each group is now limited to five people, led by a museum volunteer guide. Each guide will be wearing a visor and will ask separate groups within the walk to maintain a 2m distance from each other. The minimum number of bookings required for the walks is three people. If fewer than three people are booked on to the walk by midday the Friday before the walk, it will be cancelled and visitors will be notified on the Friday.

Amersham Old Town walks provide a fascinating insight into the history of the town, its inhabitants and its development. Here you will see many of the details of the town that you may never have noticed before. The walk is approximately one hour and a half in duration. The walks leave from the museum at 2.30pm on Sundays.

The Tudor walk enables you to learn about life – and death – in 16th century Amersham – food and drink, clothing, health and the Lollards martyrs. These walks are led by a guide in Tudor costume and start from the museum at 2.30pm on Saturdays.

We continue to welcome pre-arranged walks for groups outside normal museum opening hours, during the day or in the evening. Currently each

guide can take a maximum of five people, but more than one guide can be organised for larger groups. Contact [emily@amershammuseum.org](mailto:emily@amershammuseum.org) for more information.

We hope to see you in the museum or on one of our walks again soon. In the early autumn we will review whether we can offer some of our wider programming, including some pre-booked events and activities in the museum. Our website will be updated with the latest decisions and we will provide an update for the next newsletter.

We are also hoping to start a project in the autumn, subject to a successful funding bid, to document local people's experiences of 2020. Our project would create a portal on our website, through which people can donate photos, documents, film and audio according to particular themes. These items will be added to the museum's collection and will feature in a virtual and physical exhibition in Spring 2021.

I wish you all the best and hope that you are all keeping safe and well, **Emily**.



## Guided walks

### **Guided Walks of Old Amersham**

Sundays 2.30pm from 23rd August until 25th October

The walk departs from the museum

Pre-booking required at [www.amershammuseum.org](http://www.amershammuseum.org)

£4.50 adults, free for children

### **Tudor Walks of Old Amersham**

Saturdays 2.30pm from 22nd August until 26th Sept

The walk departs from the museum

Pre-booking required at [www.amershammuseum.org](http://www.amershammuseum.org)

£4.50 adults, free for children

# NOTICEBOARD

## Programme of Talks and Events

### Society Meetings will Continue to be held on Zoom until further Notice

About ten days before the talk Members will be sent an E-alert inviting them to join the Zoom Meeting and explaining to them how to do so.

These meetings will open at 7.45pm and the talk will start at 8.00pm.

- 30 September **Troye Cottage – an Ordinary House**  
A talk by Dr Peter Borrows
- 28 October **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**  
Followed by a talk on the **Work of the Horse Trust, Speen**, by Alice Morgan
- 25 November **With the Ghurkhas on the North East Frontier**  
A talk by Martin Brooks about his recent visit to the North East Frontier

### Amersham Society Officers

Chair	Dorothy Symes	01494 434858
Vice –Chair	Edward Copisarow	07932 152522
Secretary	Geraldine Marshall-Andrew	01494 433735
Treasurer	David Atkinson	01494 434830

Website <https://amershamsociety.org>

General Enquiries: please email [info@amershamsociety.org](mailto:info@amershamsociety.org)