



January 2021

# AMERSHAM SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



The view from Tali looking South East down the Kamla River. Article on page 29.



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Cover photograph of Old Amersham High Street by Elena Morgan.



# Report from the Chair

I am putting these thoughts together on a gloomy, damp day with the leafless trees swaying in the wind almost in sympathy with the general mood of disappointment and worry as we approach the end of 2020. It has been an awful time for some people, who have been so badly affected and worried by the pandemic and resulting restrictions. It may be because they or members of their family or friends have tested positive for Covid-19, or their businesses have been severely affected and may have to close down, or their studies have been interrupted or they have been unable to visit close family and friends. At the same time some people have been working flat out without an end in sight while for others life has not been changed that much. Usually Old Amersham is a lively, bustling sometimes crowded small town with people enjoying their visits to the beautiful area and to the excellent cafes, pubs, restaurants and shops. But during 2020 everything became different and difficult with plans having to be changed or abandoned at the last moment.

However, there is also a positive side to the events of this year. The friendly community has pulled together in many ways, helped neighbours and kept in touch despite all the restrictions and uncertainties. The eateries so much enjoyed by many have introduced innovative ways to feed their customers with deliveries and takeaways. Many residents who had kept technology at arms length have started to realise that it definitely has its uses both now and in the future and they have been surprised at how easily they have adapted to the use of computers and I-pads and smart-phones. And now the vaccination programme has just been started in certain local areas.

At the AGM in October the existing committee of seven members was re-elected for a further twelve months. I should like to thank all the committee members for the way in which they have worked so hard during the year and come up with creative ideas in order to keep the Amersham Society going and to ensure that our contact with members continues. Sadly since the AGM one of the committee stalwarts, David Atkinson, has decided that the time has come for him to step down as Treasurer. He has served the Society extremely well and efficiently over the past nine years and we are all enormously grateful to him for his work. But David's professional workload has now increased greatly and the time has come for someone else to take on the role of Amersham Society Treasurer.

We have always been very pleased when members contribute to the Newsletter with an article or a report on the outing or one of the talks. But very disappointingly neither before the AGM, during it, nor since has any other member come forward to express interest in joining the committee in any capacity. Why not? Many of you have of course already served the community well on a variety of local committees, including this one. But there must be others among our members who have not been able to help in the past but who are now interested in contributing to the future of the Society and the Community. Obviously the present committee members cannot go on for ever. You will not be surprised to hear more on this during the year.

What has the Amersham Society done during the past year? Our talks in January and February went ahead as planned and were well attended. The first, *"The Drakes of Amersham"* by Barney Tyrwhitt-Drake was given in a splendidly crowded St Mary's Church and the second in the Kings Chapel, *"The History of Pinewood Studios"*, was also well attended. Then Covid-19 interrupted our plans. Our March talk had to be cancelled at short notice and our Outing was also cancelled. But for the rest of the year technology came to our aid and we were able to hold a further eight talks on Zoom.

The Amersham Society has managed to keep in touch with members through the Zoom talks, the e-alerts, the Website and the Newsletter. The talks have been well attended and speakers and members have now become used to the Zoom system. Also our Website Manager has been excellent at managing Zoom and making sure that our speakers are on board and that those who wanted to join the meetings were almost always able to do so. In fact when the evening scheduled for a talk has been particularly dark and wet, members cheerfully enjoy the present arrangement whereby they can listen to the talk in the comfort of their own homes, perhaps with a mug of coffee or other drink, ask their questions, see and chat with friends and meet other members without having to venture out into those wet autumn and winter evenings. And we really must thank our speakers and also particularly Elena Morgan that the Amersham Society Zoom talks run so efficiently.

We have planned a programme of talks for next year and the details have been distributed with this Newsletter. While Zoom cannot completely replace our usual meetings in the Kings Chapel, it undoubtedly provides a popular evening's entertainment and keeps Society members in touch. We expect that these virtual meetings will continue for some time, at least until May and probably longer. We also have an outline outing in mind for the summer or autumn if it is possible to arrange this safely. It is obviously difficult or impossible at the moment for scientists to predict precisely what the virus will do next. But we must hope for better things in 2021.

In the meantime, I hope that you are all keeping well and have had as happy a Christmas as possible. We shall continue to keep you informed of events by e-alert, the Website and the Newsletter. This Newsletter comes with my best wishes for the New Year, when it will be great one day to meet each other again in person.

**Dorothy Symes**

**BERELEIGH ESTATE  
EAST MEON  
PETERSFIELD  
HAMPSHIRE  
GU32 1PH**

29<sup>th</sup> September

Dear Mrs Symes,

The arrival of the Amersham Society News Letter always gives me pleasure. The latest version with the article on John Lawrence is particularly interesting.

We have the most wonderful silver tankard which is 9" tall 5 ½" wide and holds over 3 pints with a tight fitting conical lid, added later. This allows cheese biscuits to stay fresh. It is hallmarked 1718. On the base it has the most lovely inscription.

*"John Lawrence Esq died 26<sup>th</sup> November 1802. He bequeathed this tankard to Thomas Tyrwhitt-Drake Esq and after him to the heir of Shardeloes forever"*

I have always been intrigued to know who John Lawrence was and by coincidence during lockdown with plenty of time to spare, I researched some documents in the drawers here at Bereleigh and found a will for the Wickham family where John Lawrence was an Executor. As a result of this, the article by Rob Michael is particularly fascinating and full of extra detail.

It would be interesting to know where the portrait came from, because I think it unlikely to have been in the Shardeloes collection as he was grandfather of the Wickham girls.

I look forward to more news and history.

With kind regards

*W.T.P. Tyrwhitt-Drake*

**W.T.P. Tyrwhitt-Drake**



*Your editor is always pleased to receive letters from readers but was especially delighted by this one from the Squire. 2020 was the 400th year of his family holding the Lordship of Amersham.*

# Subscriptions 2021

This is to remind you that your **Annual Subscription** to the Amersham Society became due on 1st January 2021. The amount is unchanged since last year, **£11.50** for an individual member, or **£17** for two family members living at the same address.

If you pay by **direct debit**, there is nothing for you to do. In fact, by the time you read this the money will probably already have been taken. Your bank statement may refer to GoCardless (which is the agent we use), rather than the Amersham Society. Unfortunately, we can't do anything about this – your bank might be able to do so.

If you pay by standing order, in most cases the money will already have been taken from your account. Nearly all members have now corrected their standing orders to reflect the increase in subscription in 2017, but the few who have still not done so can expect a letter from me shortly – unless you are quick to send me the shortfall. If, sadly, your partner died during the course of the year, did you remember to change the amount? Only you can change the standing order, I can't do it for you.


If you are one of the small number of people who still pay by **cash or cheque**, almost certainly you have not yet paid. Please send the money to me at **Troye Cottage, 32 Whielden Street, Amersham, Bucks HP7 0HU**. Please do it NOW before you forget. Alternatively, if you would like to pay in future by direct debit, send an email to [peterborrows@cantab.net](mailto:peterborrows@cantab.net) and I will arrange for both the 2021 and subsequent subscriptions to be taken in that way. I'm sorry, if you don't have an email address, we can't set up a direct debit.

Finally, do you see the regular E-alerts that we send out from time to time? If not, that's probably because you haven't told us your e-mail address. You are missing out if you don't receive them because they remind you of forth-coming events and, if we are still using Zoom for our monthly talks in place of meetings at the King's Chapel, they give you log on details. We sometimes organise social events which are not on the printed programme. So, if you haven't done so yet, please e-mail me at [peterborrows@cantab.net](mailto:peterborrows@cantab.net) so I can add your e-mail to our spreadsheet.

**Dr Peter Borrows**

Amersham Society Membership Secretary



A group of horses, including white, black, and brown ones, are running across a lush green field. In the background, a wooden fence separates the field from a line of trees. The scene is bright and sunny, with shadows cast on the grass.

# The Work of the Horse Trust, Speen

**T**he very necessary (but seldom exciting) formalities of the Society's AGM on 28 October were followed by an engaging talk by Alice Morgan, the Director of Fundraising and Marketing at The Horse Trust in Speen. I, for one, was to learn that there is much more to the Trust than providing a Home of Rest for Horses, important though that function clearly is.

Founded in 1886, and now the oldest horse charity in the world, the Trust was formed by Anne Lindo, who drew her inspiration from Anna Sewell's novel, 'Black Beauty, the Autobiography of a Horse', published in 1877. In those early days, the Home of Rest loaned fit and healthy horses to London cab drivers

while their own horses, worn out after long days of pounding the City streets, recuperated under the Trust's care in the Speen countryside. And still today the Trust's major purpose is to provide retirement and respite for working horses and ponies, and sanctuary for horses, ponies and donkeys which have suffered cruelty or neglect and are in desperate need of specialist treatment and care. Some three-quarters of the horses cared for have retired after long and distinguished service with the military, the police or the Royal Mews, or with other charities working with horses, such as Riding for the Disabled, while the remaining quarter are being nurtured back to health after serious neglect.

The Trust's most famous residents were probably three horses badly injured in the Hyde Park bombings in 1982 – Sefton and Yeti from the Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment, and Echo of the Metropolitan Police. Other horses from the equine nobility have been Cloud and Claudia, mother and daughter from the Royal Mews who, on various occasions, had pulled the Queen's carriage at Royal Ascot and drawn William and Kate's carriage at their wedding; Elizabeth, Princess Anne's parade horse for 16 years; Samson from the South Wales Police Force, who had paraded both at the London Olympics in 2012 and Harry and Meghan's wedding; and Esmeralda of the King's Troop, to be seen on the big screen in the Downton Abbey film as well as in Hyde Park for the Royal salute on the Queen's birthday. Not to be compared in stature with these grand horses, but surely, just as appealing, must be the Trust's smallest pony, standing just 31 inches high.

The Trust works closely with the RSPCA, Trading Standards and other animal welfare organisations to rescue horses, donkeys and ponies that have suffered neglect or abuse, both physical and mental. The Trust strives to rehabilitate and, if possible, rehome these animals, teaching them to live in a herd or to go into a stable, or perhaps just how to be a horse again after years of deprivation.

So, what other roles does the Trust undertake ? It attaches much impor-

tance to training. Have you thought how you would respond if horses or other large adrenalized animals were running loose on a motorway following a crash, or were trapped, badly injured, in a vehicle? The Trust, in conjunction with the British Animal Rescue and Trauma Care Association, offers emergency responder training to officers from the Fire and Rescue Service, the Police and Highways England. Then there are courses delivering continuing professional development for farriers and veterinary surgeons, nurses and dentists. And finally, in these troubled Covid times, an impressive range of online courses on a wide variety of subjects touching upon animal welfare.



Nicky and Gawain

The Trust's third major activity is the promotion of scientific research. Since 1965, it has given over £25 million in funding for research projects and clinical residences, and capital for buildings and equipment for veterinary schools and other institutions, the objective in all cases being the development of excellence and knowledge in equine care and



Horses Charlotte from the Metropolitan Police and Boris from the Thames Valley Police

the prevention of disease and suffering. Alice gave examples of two recent pieces of research, the first into equine strangles, an upper respiratory tract infection that can lead to airway obstruction and death; the second atypical myopathy, a frequently fatal disease caused by eating too many sycamore seeds. Research studies such as these have brought benefits worldwide.

All this work, of course, comes at a price. The Trust's budget is some £2.5 million a year, every penny of which comes from voluntary donations. About 60% of its income comes from legacies,

while other sources of income include adopting and sponsoring a horse, the hire of Sefton's Barn, a 14th century tithe barn offering a very attractive venue for weddings, conferences and lunches, a Visitor Centre and café, and attendance at such events as the Royal Windsor Horse Show and Christmas markets. If Alice's talk, her story of endless compassion and concern for our equine friends, has tugged even a little at your heart strings, take a look at the Trust's website, <https://horsetrust.org.uk>, and perhaps consider making a donation.

**David Cash**

# Troye Cottage an Ordinary House

The Events Team were delighted that Peter Borrows agreed to talk to us last September about his home in Old Amersham. It became clear as the talk progressed what an ambitious undertaking the research into the history of Troye Cottage had been and how many different records such as indentures, inventories, land tax records, censuses, maps and plans Peter and Marian had had to consult during 2013 to find out the history of this rather special house.

Peter explained at the beginning of his talk that Troye Cottage is on the eastern side of Whielden Street, a Roman road in Old Amersham. The house is described as “ordinary” in the title but in fact it is different from all the other houses in the terrace. There is, however, no way of distinguishing Troye Cottage from the other houses apart from describing it. Which Peter proceeded to do in clear and interesting detail.

At the time Troye Cottage was built, the grand houses, inns and farms all had names, but terraced houses did not and street numbers were introduced only in the 1850s. Records show that in 1702 during the reign of Queen Anne, John Daveney who lived with his wife Mary in

Penn, had sold some land to Richard Sheppard for £20. The land had stables and outbuildings and ran from “Whildon Street” (one of the many spellings of Whielden Street) to the orchard of John Wingfield towards the Broadway. At that time the next door house to the right of the land where Troye Cottage would be built and the attached land were occupied by Edward Child. The house on the left hand side was occupied by William Browne.

When Peter and Marian moved to Troye Cottage in 1999 the estate agent told them that it was a Grade 2 listed cottage. The listing stated that it was timber-framed and that the fronting dated from the early eighteenth century and that it had two stories. The Borrows established, however, that it was not re-fronted in the eighteenth century, the house was not timber framed and it has in fact more than two stories. Peter showed us two recent photographs of his house giving a view that we would rarely see today. No cars were parked in front of the house and Peter had been able to stand in the middle of the road to take the pictures and survive to tell the tale. Peter described the meticulous research that he and Marian had undertaken in 2013 setting aside about a day



a week over the year for their project. During that year they uncovered an amazing amount of detail about their cottage, its residents and the contents. And it seems as though their work continues.

Much of the information about the sale of the land for Troye Cottage was taken from a legal document, an indenture. Peter showed us a copy of the document, which was signed by John Daveney. The indenture provided proof of ownership and Peter described how the system worked. Two copies of the agreement, in the case of Troye Cottage of the sale agreement, were written on a piece of parchment or vellum. When the transaction was agreed, the document was then cut in half in a zigzag fashion. The previous owner had proof of the agreed price and the new owner, having the matching piece of parchment, had legal proof of ownership. According to the copy of the indenture that Peter had the land ran from Whildon Street (the spelling of the street name has a number of versions) to the orchard of the dwelling house of John Wingfield.

Peter and Marian managed to find out quite a lot about Richard Sheppard. Richard married Anne in Clerkenwell in 1698. Anne was said to be 16 years old at the time. Richard was described as a currier, someone who works with leather, colouring and softening it with oils, before it was handed over to the saddlers, shoemakers and cobblers. Anne's nephew, Richard Norwood, was

taken on as an apprentice and Richard Sheppard took on at least one more apprentice, whose father paid £10.00 for his son's position.



Richard built his house as an infill between what are now numbers 30A and 34 Whielden Street, so that the walls of these two adjoining cottages also form the walls of Troye Cottage. We were shown plans of the original house with a passage running along the right hand side of the property to allow access to the land and gardens at the back. Later a door was cut from the passage into the house built by Richard Sheppard. As can be seen from the photograph there are two front doors to Troye Cottage, the door on the left hand side is now blocked up. Today this causes the Post Office and various delivery staff some confusion even though that door has a planter in front of it and no letter box. The right hand door opening to the passageway is now the Borrows' front door. The dimensions given in the indenture for the land where Troye Cottage stands matches within about two inches the measurements of the property as it is today.



As an example of the Borrowes' research, Peter told us about another old indenture that he had seen that related to an agreement to rent out Troye Cottage. This indenture included details of a fitted kitchen and various pieces of furniture and equipment including a "bacon rack". Peter and Marian had gone to some trouble to establish exactly what a bacon rack was and they consulted a book published in 1923 that recorded that there were three inns in Buckinghamshire at the time which all had bacon racks. Unfortunately these inns no longer exist. Peter and Marian then had plans to visit a museum in Yorkshire this summer to continue their search, but Covid-19 put paid to that.

During Richard's life the Lords of the Manor, the Tyrwhitt-Drakes, believed they had the right to send their sons to Parliament. Richard Sheppard was a "Freeholder", one of 130 men in Aylesbury who could vote in Aylesbury at elections. There was no secret ballot and records show that Richard voted for the losing candidate in two elections. Peter showed us a picture of a map of Whielden Street, the properties were colour-coded to show which properties were owned by the Tyrwhitt-Drake family and men living in the Tyrwhitt - Drake properties were expected to vote for their candidate. If they did not do this, they were likely to have to leave their home. There was also a later record in 1723 to show that Richard had been assessed for parish poor relief.

In 1729 Richard made a will leaving the property to his wife and his tools

and skins to his apprentice, Richard Norwood. In Elizabethan times the wool trade had suffered and the dead had to be buried in wool to help this trade. There was a fine if anyone was not buried wearing a woollen shroud and records show that Richard had a woollen shroud for his funeral in 1732.

Peter went on to show us copies of a series of documents and inventories which contained records and descriptions of various domestic items and helped to build a picture of the household when Richard and Anne lived there. After Richard's death Anne Sheppard continued to live in the house until her death in 1745.

The "parlour" at the front of the house was used to entertain Richard's clients, and Peter was able to supply details of items included in the inventory for this room, which was rather sparsely furnished. The inventory of possessions was two feet six inches long and among other items listed two cheese plates. These were probably made of wood at that time rather than porcelain which came later. A further two feet six inches of the inventory were devoted to Richard's work equipment such as skins and tools. When Peter moved to Troye Cottage he found a bucket shaped container embedded in the floor of the cellar which probably acted as a type of sump. This often filled with water and the water would probably have been pumped from it to an old stone sink in the pantry. Peter had found the sink in his garden when he first moved to the property.

In the Kitchen

Also sixteen Pewter dishes  
two Gilt plates two dozen of  
plates two porringers & a dresser  
with shelves one Oval table  
six plain chairs two Arm  
chairs three joint stools one  
pair of doggs five shovels and tongues one  
pair of Bellows one pair of Roasting dogs  
one pair of brass Candelsticks one butter  
three Spits one dripping pan one Dettle  
and Mortar one pepper Caster one flower  
Caster two learning pans one Tish and  
four tin Candelsticks six pounds  
Sixteen shillings

In the Parlor

Also one Clock with Chimes five plain chairs  
one Arm chair a Pier glass one Oval table  
one Square table a fire shovel tongues and  
Andirons eight pounds two shillings

In the Cellar

Also two Firkins and one Kilderkin  
Seven shillings and six pence

In the Washhouse

Also one Copper to melt one Dish  
bottle three Skillets thirteen tubs and  
wash tubs four Firkins two spails  
and two dozen of Bottles three pounds  
six shillings

In the Pantry

Also two Porridge pots and three  
pewter dishes fourteen shillings

In the Best Chamber

Also One Bedstead and Lamblett



The garden sink

The Borrows had made copies of the old Land Tax Register and also the censuses, which were started in Victorian times. Both these sources helped to provide details of who had lived in the property over the years, what their occupation was and for how long they were there. The property had been sold to Thomas Drake Tyrwhitt-Drake in 1803 and the related documents are held in the Drake Archives. The census also showed that some families lived in the house for a long time, twenty or even thirty years. The records were all hand-written, and a striking feature of the copies of Land Tax records that we were shown was that they were in beautifully legible copper plate. The Tyrwhitt-Drake family finally sold the property in 1957 to the Randle family.

Peter spoke to us about the origins of two names. First “Troye” Cottage

why not Sheppard’s Cottage? One explanation was that a previous owner, Mrs Dalton-Morris, had lived with her husband in the Cornish town of Fowey during the war. The author Quiller-Couch had written books about a fictional town, Troy, and it was believed that the author had drawn widely on the town of Fowey and the surrounding area for his book.

The second name to ponder about was Whielden Street. One explanation could be that it, or one of the versions of it, was named after William of Whildene. Another explanation of the name was that it was “hwael dene” which meant curved valley. And looking at an old map of this former Roman road the curved valley was quite clearly evident.

So having filled our heads with a huge amount of information about this ordinary house, Peter closed by saying that he was very glad that Troye Cottage had not been an extraordinary house. And the listeners realised that, although they might often have walked along Whielden Street, they had not realised what a wealth of knowledge was hidden away behind the front wall of Troye Cottage and indeed almost certainly behind many other front walls in Old Amersham.

**Dorothy Symes**

Note: If any of you have now been inspired to study the history of your own home Peter Borrows has written a short paper “Researching the History of your House” based on his and Marian’s experience and this should provide some useful starting points. See page 24

# Amersham Charter Fair 2020

Many members have perhaps not yet realised that the Amersham Society website, <https://www.amershamsociety.org>, hosts a variety of useful information. For example, back in September 2020, it posted the following notice.

*Following careful consultation between Mr William Tyrwhitt-Drake (The Charter Holder), Buckinghamshire Council, the Showmen, local businesses and residents of Old Amersham, the difficult decision has been taken to cancel the Old Amersham Charter Fair. This takes place every year on the 19th and 20th September.*

*Given concerns about Covid-19 and trying to work within the Government guidelines, Mr Tyrwhitt-Drake felt this was the best way to proceed and the right course of action based on the information currently available.*

*The showmen were able to demonstrate the social distancing rules could be applied to the rides and other attractions. It is the difficulty of social distancing of those attending the fair that caused the greatest concern.*

*The Charter Fair has always taken place, even during the two World Wars. So to keep with tradition, there will be a small presence of side shows (off road) over the course of the 19th and 20th September.*

*It will be very disappointing to many people that the Charter Fair has been cancelled but we look forward to a return in 2021.*



It may surprise members to realise that the Lord of the Manor still has a role in 21st century Amersham but the pandemic has revealed many surprising facts. For example, who amongst the passers-by on 19th September, would have realised that this one stall was the Amersham Charter Fair 2020 –

the whole of the Charter Fair.

The Charter Fair is perhaps not universally popular but traditions going back over 800 years should not allow a pandemic to kill them off by default, so let's hope it can take place with renewed vigour in 2021.

**Dr Peter Borrows**





# Old Amersham 30 Commando HQ

One day in August the doorbell rang. I answered it to find two ladies-outside. As I did not recognise either of them, I asked if I could help ? One spoke up and said *"Can I say something ?"*. I told her to say whatever she wanted thinking that she probably wanted directions to the hospital or help with a car tyre puncture or breakdown.

She said *"My father lived here with 30 Commando"* and burst into tears.

I invited her inside and listened to her story. Her name is Hilary Toyn nee Belcher. Her father was Captain Thomas Eaton Belcher of 30 Commando who was stationed in Coldmoreham in 1942. She obtained this from letters written home to his wife. She still possessed his military uniform.

Sadly, he had been killed in action aged 27 in Greece in 1942. I presume that she must have been still a small child at the time of his death.

I was able to tell her what little I knew about 30 Commando which was a relatively small unit of very brave men later called 30 (Commando) Assault Unit which functioned during WW2 between 1942–1946. Their insignia was *"Attain by Surprise"* They included some colourful characters. One notable individual was Johnny Ramensky a Lithuanian descended safe-cracker from

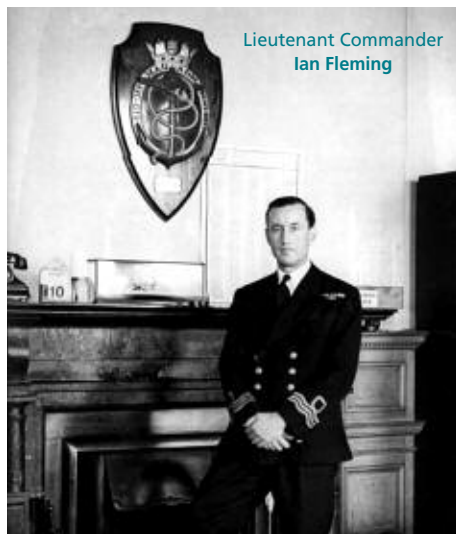
Scotland who was sent to the Unit to blow up safes.

A notable commander was Lieutenant Commander Quinton, Theodore Petroe Molesworth Riley !



Johnny Ramensky

Apparently, they spent their time in Amersham in what was known as Coldmoreham Farm being trained in forcing entry to buildings, unarmed combat and the handling of explosives. The late Gerry Dyche told me he could remember hearing the bangs they made. The officers lived in Coldmoreham House and the other ranks were billeted elsewhere down the High Street.



Lieutenant Commander  
Ian Fleming



The Unit was the brainchild of Ian Fleming of James Bond fame and their nickname was Ian Fleming's "*Red Indians*". Ian Fleming was 34, a Lieutenant Commander in the RNVR based in the Admiralty working in naval intelligence under Admiral Godfrey.

The unit composed of about 120 men was tasked to move ahead of advancing Allied forces or to undertake covert infiltrations into enemy territory by land, sea or air, to capture much needed intelligence, in the form of codes, documents, equipment or enemy personnel. The Unit was initially deployed for the first time during the Dieppe Raid in August 1942 in an unsuccessful secret attempt to capture an Enigma machine.

They then took part in the Operation Torch landings in November 1942. They landed to the West of Algiers on 8th November. By the next day all the battle orders for the German and Italian fleets current codebooks and other documents had all been sent back to London.

The Unit went on to serve in the Greek Islands, Norway, Sicily, Italy and Corsica.

In June 1944 they took part in the Normandy landings having moved their HQ from Old Amersham to Littlehampton on the South coast. By May 1945 they had captured the German Naval Base at Bremen Germany. A field team of 30 Assault unit took the surrender of Werner Von Braun and Walter Dornberger in Bavaria.



Walter Dornberger and Werner Von Braun after their surrender to the Allies in Bavaria

The Unit was disbanded in 1946. However, in 2013 the Unit's successor organisation 30 Commando Information Exploitation Group was granted the Freedom of Littlehampton in honour of the original Unit being stationed in the Town during the Second World War. Some mementoes can be seen in the Littlehampton Museum.

PS. Anyone interested in learning more might like to read "*Ian Fleming's Commandos*" by Nicholas Rankin published by Faber & Faber Ltd in 2011.



More information is also now available in the Public Records office in Kew. Reference ADM 223/214.

**Tony Westhead**



# Royalty and Roses, Battleships and Bi-planes

## Astounding Amersham Memorial Gardens

What a delight to stumble across ... a blaze of colour spotted from the High Street enticed two ladies on a day trip to Amersham to enter what seemed to be a small park. Small maybe, but filled with the history of this market town and its special associations but ... where to start? Amongst the carefully tended flowerbeds commanding attention you see not just geometric patterns but a glorious butterfly set perfectly against

the backdrop of neighbouring St. Mary's Church. The recurring theme is one of remembrance with a moving figure of a WWI soldier, head bowed in memory of his fallen comrades, upon a stone but flower festooned plinth. Then, so unexpectedly, nestling within the flowerbeds you come across not one bi-plane, but two. One commemorates the Albert Ball SE5a bi-plane of WWI, named after Albert Ball, a posthumous VC recipient who died in



1917 but had been stationed at London Colney. The other depicts his personal plane, A8898, flown while at No. 56 Squadron. Across the gardens a mini-replica of HMS Dreadnought, her brave sailors portrayed by bright yellow flowers as she ploughs through a muddy sea dotted with crashing waves fashioned from wispy grasses. One of the visitors, a staunch royalist then spotted a giant stamp with the iconic Arnold Machin profile of Queen Elizabeth II outlined in metal and surrounded by roses. A tiled roundel in red, white and blue announced this corner had been dedicated for her 90th birthday. How ironic that a stone's

throw from this celebration is a plaque on the Market Building proclaiming Amersham's allegiance with the Parliamentary cause during the 17th century Civil War. With a picture-perfect bridge, fishpond, a peace garden and sensory plants this garden is a revelation and a testimony of how Amersham values its history and residents who have put so much into their community. Those who have not only planned and brought to fruition this beautiful, colourful, tranquil and fascinating corner of their Old Town but also maintained it so beautifully, should be so proud.

**Rachel Kolsky and Janet Langdon.**



# 'How to Make a Difference' or 'Having a Shot at Being Rector of Amersham'



It has always been a privilege and sometimes a pleasure to be Rector. No one was more surprised than me when the then Bishop of Buckingham and the Patron of the parish Bill Tyrwhitt-Drake offered me the job in the late autumn of 1996. I was vicar of an inner-city East London parish in Deptford, an area between Tower Bridge and what was then still the Millennium Dome. My children were sometimes minority first language English speakers in their classes at school. The levels of deprivation and urban crime were very high. We were burgled most years and I had got adept at dodging physical assault on my doorstep. Tom Hollander's TV series 'Rev' got it so well.

*'Strange thing is,' I remarked to Bill, 'I live on Wickham Road, we have a Tyrwhitt Road and a Drake Road in my parish; there is an Amersham Way and a Shardeloes Road too.' 'No surprise there,' replied Bill. 'My family owned all the land in that part of south east London since two Drake boys married two Wickham sisters in the early C19. The girls were great heiresses. We gave the land for St Peter's Brockley where you are vicar when it was built in 1865, and in fact I only sold the freehold of the last of our streets up there a few years ago to Lewisham Council. We know all about you!'*

Strange indeed. It was almost as if I were destined to make the move that my predecessor Rev John Drake had made when he left the living at Deptford parish to become rector of the family living in Amersham in the first part of the C19. I duly accepted the offer and we arrived from the urban depths to live in perhaps one of the most beautiful locations in the land at Old Amersham. Waking up in the rectory next morning felt like being on holiday in an expensive gîte!

Good so far. However, it soon became apparent that the carefully drawn up job description I had been given, namely to focus on work with schools and young people to draw them into church would be deeply resented and resisted by a vocal and powerful ‘old guard’ for the next ten years. They were equally opposed to the equality and ministry of women priests. This possibility had not been mentioned. If it had I would not have accepted the job. I wonder if my successor will be (unintentionally I am sure) kept in the dark in the same way about current issues? I trust not.

However, we persevered, and the congregation at the main all age Sunday morning service quickly doubled. This caused even more resentment. The ordination of my wife Rosie and the Bishop’s enlightened decision to let her serve her curacy here, plus that of the Rev Liz Norman, expanded our team, and their success gave the lie to those who believed so passionately their ministry to be invalid. Rosie of course has gone on to great things as a leading member of General Synod and as one of the media stars of the Church of England.

One of the great things about the parish is that it has become a place where the rich and famous can rely on having their spiritual needs met, for example the High Sherriff of

Buckingham, Elton John’s family, Mary Berry and Commissioner Cressida Dick have all expressed their satisfaction in the way we handled services for them, be they happy or sad. But I am even more proud of the way the Traveller or recently ex-Traveller communities decided they liked us too. I quickly had to learn a whole new vocabulary and set of social skills to show respect, for instance that folding money must be seen to change hands outside. To refuse is a deadly insult. But as I stood beside the grave of a small child, and the elderly grand matriarch of the family took my arm to steady herself and between tears told me the story of growing up as one of 13 siblings on the road in Ireland between the wars, I felt I had succeeded.

What people generally think of as the difficult bits of the job I find the best. All those funerals? Well, I find great satisfaction helping families safely through the uncharted waters of bereavement, the service and the grieving process, in just the same way as a surgeon might lead patients and their loved ones through the surgery, chemotherapy and possible recovery. The same goes for panicky brides and their families, but of course the stresses and strains are different. As I go into church or the Crem chapel, the Holy Spirit whispers in my ear, ‘Offer them hope.’ I do.



Our schools are the crown jewels of the parish. Every Monday or Wednesday morning I have stood outside, come rain or shine, to greet the parents and children. In that way they learn who we are, and in building that friendly relationship know where to come when they need help or to see the priest, as sooner or later almost everyone does. That and greeting the congregation outside the church main door before every service are two of the old fashioned but effective vicars' tricks of the trade, which as Area Dean I struggle to pass on to new incumbents. 'What? Stand outside every time and greet people in a polite and friendly way? Couldn't possibly do that Tim!' But the benefits far outweigh the outlay.

In the past three years one of the best things for me has been to be made an Hon Canon (the clerical DSO in the gift of the Bishop) of Christ Church Cathedral Oxford, and to be invited as a trained professional singer to join the service and music team as Precentor sometimes. The Precentor leads and sings the service as soloist with the Cathedral Choir. To raise my game to meet the world class standard demanded has cost me dear, and my heart races as I enter what is arguably the inner sanctum of the Church of England and hear them rehearsing. I do it because it scares me. They say that to

do something like this on a regular basis keeps one sharp. Eek!

I had planned to retire last September but as the pandemic hit and we were asked to identify fields for mass burials by the local authority and stand by with the prayer book and bulldozer, it seemed churlish to leave the bridge as the hurricane hit. Fortunately, while we have all suffered, in practice it has been nothing like as bad.

During lockdown, with the St Mary's church closed for public worship, the PCC took the opportunity to do a complete rewire of the building, a complete re-light, and complete redecoration, each a massive project in its own right. The cost of some hundreds of thousands of pounds was met out of the Parker Trust and other reserves tied to the maintenance of the building. There could never be a better or more opportune moment to get the long overdue work done. The result is magnificent. St Mary's Church has never looked better. I leave my successor a clean slate to get on with ministry in their own way, rather than immediately having to head up building work.

And during the lockdown and tiers system, we have learned how to stream services effectively, so that those who would like to attend worship but are shielding in some way may join us from home. This has proved very popular and

doubtless will need to continue for some time.

Rosie and I will retire and move away just after Easter 2021.

So, does having a faith make a difference?

Followers of most religions would say so, but of course just what that difference they make is will vary wildly from group to group. For Christians, this strange belief that God became a human being (jargon word ‘Incarnation’), that he lived a life as an ordinary manual worker in a remote part of the middle east, became a wandering Rabbi, was murdered, rose from the dead and whose teaching still rings round the world today, is hard for some to credit. But believe it we do, and hopefully it makes a positive contribution to the way we live our lives now and is not just a spiritual hope for the future.

Faith should do that. As the former Chief Rabbi Lord Sacks, who shared Jesus’ race and profession, put it, *“I believe faith is part of what makes us human. It is a basic attitude of trust that always goes beyond the available evidence, but without which we could do nothing great. Without faith in one another we could not risk the vulnerability of love. Without faith in the future, we would not choose to have a child. Without faith in the intelligibility of the universe we could not do science. Without faith in our fellow citizens, we could not have a free society.”*

(Times obit 9/11/20.)

I think that Jesus might just agree. What an interesting conversation they must be having!

I wish you all in Amersham the best for the future, and apologise that you will see younger versions of me popping up on ITV3 in repeats of Midsomer Murders (11 series) for decades to come!

**Rev Canon Tim Harper**

Rector of Amersham with Coleshill    1997 – 2021

# Researching the History of Your House

**A**nyone researching the history of their house needs to realise that it will probably take a very long time, a lot of patience and some extremely boring days. We started seriously in January 2013, spending about 5-6 hours every Friday, mostly at the Buckinghamshire Archives in Aylesbury, but occasionally at the National Archives at Kew. We did not have a breakthrough until September and didn't really finish for another couple of months – and are still finding things. It is important to keep very careful records of every document you look at, note its reference number, key aspects, etc even if it at the time it seems completely irrelevant. It may turn out to be useful later on and it is exceedingly frustrating to try to track it down again if you think it may be relevant after all.

Don't believe all the myths and rumours that people will tell you, especially the firmly held ones. There will often be a grain of truth in them but a very distorted grain. We were told our house was named after a previous owner's holiday cottage. We were told by somebody else it was based on the old name for Fowey, in Cornwall. Neither were true – it was actually named after a fictitious town in the stories of Arthur Quiller-Couch, which was however based on the real town of Fowey where Quiller-Couch had a holiday home and a previous owner of Troye Cottage had spent her war time honeymoon. Do talk to neighbours or look in old books – but make sure you've got a pinch of salt handy.

You can find popular documents, such as census returns, on-line on family history sites and this will be useful for finding who lived there between 1841 and 1911 and, in most cases their occupations and birthplaces. The 1911 census tells you the number of rooms, which is especially useful for house history purposes. There was a register drawn up at the start of the war in 1939 which gives similar information to a census but some bits are redacted if the people may be still alive. Although increasing numbers of documents are being digitised and made available on-line, going back before 1841 you will need to visit the local archives. You don't need to phone the Aylesbury Archives before visiting, except to find out which days they are open. As with any archives, you will need a reader's ticket which you can get on arrival, providing you have two forms of identification, eg a passport and bank statement. No pens are allowed in the Archives – you must use pencil. You can take photographs but have to pay. The National Archives are similar but rather more rigorous.

One of the hardest things is to identify where your house is. Houses in Amersham Old Town were re-numbered in the early 1950s and no houses were numbered until the 1850s. Were the numbers consecutive, or were odd and even numbers on opposite sides of the road? In some (but not all) censuses entries may have been numbered in sequence. In some censuses (but again not all) in the 19th century Whielden Street was called Union Street. You can

sometimes count along from fixed points, eg in our case from the Saracen's Head Inn. BUT be careful – have buildings been split or combined? Pubs get renamed or moved as happened to the Saracen's Head when it moved from The Broadway to Whielden Street in the early part of the 18th century. To help work out the location of our house I drew up a spreadsheet showing all our neighbours and it is worth doing this in case you suddenly find you have been investigating the wrong house. For well over a hundred years our house was identified as the cottage which Richard Sheppard built but the plot of land on which it was built was identified by being between the house occupied by Edward Child and that occupied by William Browne, so documents relating to our house tell you occupants of neighbouring houses.

Looking at maps is very important, because it may well give you the names of neighbours, which is useful for identifying where your house is in relation to them, as above. Old Amersham is very fortunate because there are at least three important maps. There is the 1742 Map of Agmondesham drawn up for the Tyrwhitt-Drake family to identify which houses they needed to buy in order to buy their votes. The 1839 Tythe map needs to be read in conjunction with the separate list of names. The originals of all these maps are in Aylesbury but there are good copies at the Amersham Museum (but possibly not the 1839 list of names). The 1928 Drake sale map is also often useful depending whether your house was owned by the Tyrwhitt-Drakes. One

technique I used with the maps, eg the 1742 map, was to take a photo of the Whielden (Wilding) Street part, and then print it quite faintly in black-and-white onto transparent (OHP) sheets. I then used OHP pens to mark who I knew was living in particular houses at particular dates (colour-coded). I could then overlay these sheets and spot anomalies and/or find gaps.

In the past, when you sold a house you needed to be able to prove that it was yours to sell. You did that by showing that when you bought it the vendor proved it was his to sell by showing that when he had bought it was his vendor's to sell and so on. Or that he had evidence he had bought the land. Every time a house changed hands these documents (which might also include rental documents, extracts from wills, etc) accumulated. We have the deeds of our house dating back to the early 1950s when the house was sold by the Drake estate. Most of the earlier deeds from 1702 to 1803 are in the Drake archives at Aylesbury but took a lot of finding (because the archives are massive). If your house eventually ended up in a great estate (eg the church or, around here, the Tyrwhitt-Drakes) they may eventually find their way into a collection in some Archives. There are two separate collections of Drake archives in Aylesbury but Amersham was once in the Manor owned by the Earls of Essex and so it's possible there may be some relevant holdings in Chelmsford. One of the problems with some documents you are likely to look at is the handwriting. Victorian documents are mostly like ours

– mostly legible although some words may be difficult to decipher. If you are lucky, later 18th century documents may be in glorious copper plate but especially 17th century and earlier documents may be in what is often called English Secretary Hand – you can download an example alphabet from the internet but it is still hard work to decipher!

There are Land Tax records available at Aylesbury, going back to the 17th century and in the 18th century these are in easily-read copper plate and very definitely worth looking at. The Land Tax Assessment of 1910 ("Domesday") can also be very informative. The earliest I looked at was the Land Tax 1694. There are a range of other documents which may be useful, for example Assessment for Parish Poor Relief. Records of the Court Baron for the Manor in which the house is situated will often be informative. There are also Tithe record books. The Amersham Parish Register is in the Aylesbury Archives and I think goes back to the 16th century, but you might have to brush up your Latin for the earliest records. The Register of Electors (or Polling Registers) tell you who was eligible to vote in the 20th century. Fortunately, most women were given the vote in 1918 so they are listed, but of course no children. Trade directories can also be useful – the Amersham Museum has some as does the Buckinghamshire Archives. Remember, in the past, most people worked from home, not just shopkeepers. There was no secret ballot until 1872 and you may be able to find records; for example see the List of names



✓ D <sup>r</sup> John Andrews	Wm. Chasman	6
D <sup>r</sup> Martin Noble	Peter Ann Barce	10
W <sup>m</sup> Raddinson	William Deanshfield	4
Thomas Novette	Susanna Wingfield	4
Wm Drake Esq <sup>r</sup>	Of herself	14
D <sup>r</sup>	James Hunt & Esq. Deanshfield	9
D <sup>r</sup>	John Lee	8
✓ Martin Noble	Late Dumbarton	4
Wm Drake Esq <sup>r</sup>	William Tiptons	8
D <sup>r</sup>	William Wilkes	4
Charles Child	Dorothy Lee	4
Robert Esles	John Tiptons	10
Wm Drake Esq <sup>r</sup>	Himself	4
D <sup>r</sup>	Himself for Orchard	6
D <sup>r</sup>	John Tiptons Jun <sup>r</sup>	12
D <sup>r</sup>	John Kien	5
D <sup>r</sup>	Edward Hatch	5
✓ Benjamin Child	Henry Baldwin	7
Wm Drake Esq <sup>r</sup>	Joseph Marycote	4
✓ John Salter	Himself	4
Mark Noble	Benjamin Child	13
	Sarah Cannon	6
		6

of freeholders who voted in 1713, 1722 and 1774 (all at the Aylesbury Archives).

Once you know some names it is always worthwhile looking to see what else you can find about them. Search for the names in on-line newspaper files (I think Aylesbury has the local ones freely accessible). Were they once apprenticed or employ apprentices? There are Apprenticeship books at Kew. Best of all, find out if they left a will, which will give you insight into their family members and friends. Some wills are at the National Archives at Kew and some at Aylesbury. You can do an on-line search for Kew records and some of the records have been digitised (but you have to pay to view/copy). I'm not sure how far Ayles-

bury have got now with putting stuff on-line or digitising. Sometimes, you may be lucky enough to find an Inventory. This was a list drawn up for probate purposes and includes personal belongings, such as money, clothes, furniture, cooking implements, tools, etc, usually accompanied by a valuation. Inventories give a wonderful picture of how a house was used centuries ago and may accompany wills but unfortunately survive for very few people. See the extract from the Inventory of the Goods and Chattels and Credits of the deceased [Richard Sheppard], exhibited 20 April 1733. The full inventory is about 1.5 metres long, the extract is about 35 cm worth.

**Dr Peter Borrows**

# Festive Front Door Competition Winners

## Business and Residential



Winner for the residents' wreaths was **Marilyn Croft** and of the business category was the restaurant **Pluma** in the High Street.

The judges found it very difficult to choose just one winner from each category. People had made great efforts to ensure that the doors in the Old Town looked festive and attractive during these difficult times.

We should like to thank everyone who took part and helped to lift the spirits of both residents and visitors as they walked through Old Amersham during the Christmas period.





# With the Gurkhas on India's North East Frontier



Our November talk was given by Martin Brooks, who will be well known to many members as our chairman for nine years. During his time serving in the 7th Gurkha Rifles, he extended his interest to the Himalayas and recently completed a masters degree at The School of Oriental and African Studies, specialising in the region. He is now chairman of the trustees of the Gurkha Museum in Winchester.

Martin's talk was entitled 'With the Gurkhas on India's North East Frontier' and covered the amazing trip to Arunachal Pradesh he made in 2018, together with two fellow SOAS post graduate students, Amanda Taylor and Claire Blaser. They went to find out what really happened to the colonial expedition

known as the 'Miri Mission' of 1911-12, by seeking the memories handed down of the local Nyishi people and to get a more balanced narrative of what really happened, rather than relying on colonial records. The Expedition had not ended well. The talk was in two parts, the events of the Miri Mission and their own journey to the same area in 2018. Writing in 1953, this remote area was described by the anthropologist and author Ursula Graham Bowyer who had failed to reach Tali, as a "Hidden Land".

In 1911 the Government of India decided to send a mission into the cloud forested hills of Arunachal Pradesh to explore and get to know the local "Hill Miri" people in colonial parlance, now more correctly known as Nyishi, as well as

surveying a potential frontier with Tibet. The leader was Mr G C Kerwood of the Indian Civil Service and a sub divisional officer North Lakhimpur, with a military escort, of 75 Gurkha riflemen led by Captain A M Graham of the 5th Gurkha Rifles. There was also an intelligence officer, a surveyor, a supply officer and initially 300 Nepali porters (although 300 more Naga and Lushai porters and more Gurkha riflemen were brought in later). Sadly, the planning in advance was not up to the task and travelling in the hills was difficult with slippery footpaths, steep slopes, mud and rivers to cross. They left North Lakhimpur on 21st October of 1911, but made very slow progress up into the uncharted hills. However by February of 1912 they had completed some surveying and made a base camp at Tali by the Kamla River, a tributary of the Subansiri River. On St. Valentine's day, the initially friendly approach of the local

people changed dramatically, and the camp was attacked at dawn and nearly overwhelmed, but prompt action by Graham, saved the day for the Miri Mission. Their colonial Reports stated that 20 village people were killed and many wounded. Captain Graham assumed command and gave instructions for Tali and two nearby clan villages to be burnt down. The expedition then abandoned the mission and did not make it to the Snows as they had intended. Tali continued its isolated life and was left alone by both the colonial and Indian governments, until it was later claimed and occupied as part of India as late as 1957.

Inspired by his studies and the handwritten diary of Captain Graham, Martin and his colleagues planned to travel there in March 2018 to research the legacy of the Miri Mission and to find out what really happened. The group had to obtain Special Permitted Area Permits before





setting off for the three-week trip starting from Delhi. The journey involved an internal flight, a long road journey and then days trekking on foot. Like the Miri Mission, they made an arduous trek on difficult terrain, contending with landslides, precarious wooden bridges across rivers and slippery paths and slopes on the muddy hillsides – all in the rain! They arrived in Tali, wet, tired and exhausted, to a village spread along the peak of a ridge in the Himalayan foothills. Many villagers told them that they were the first Europeans that they had ever encountered.

Thanks to several interpreters, the group were able to benefit from the Nyishi oral tradition where memories handed down from ancestors would be explored. It appeared that there were errors in the official account and 5 not 20 people had been killed; they could name all of the fatalities of those local people who were killed. One very old lady claimed to be there as a child when it happened and could recall the death of one man, the looting of their treasures



Field Research -  
The Tali Villagers tell their stories.

and the burning of the village, interesting, but alas improbable, as that would have made her more than 106 years old. There were no recollections of the British and Indian officers involved. When asked why the camp was attacked by the villagers, they attributed it to one man who persuaded everyone that the expedition had come to capture and possibly execute the village elders.

The Nyishi people are the largest tribal group in Arunachal Pradesh – the word Nyishi means ‘a human being’. Some still practice polygamy with large extended families and refer to their dwellings as having ‘many hearths’. Their traditional dress includes a hornbill head dress with a brass rod through their hair. A minority still follow ‘Donyi Polo,’ sun and the moon worship, although the majority are now Christian and members of the Assam Baptist Church. These Baptist Christians are teetotallers and went to great trouble and expense to bring up copious quantities of Pepsi Cola to drink rather than the local grog



The steep muddy track up to Tali Village

‘apong’. Their wealth was traditionally and to some extent is still measured in Tibetan beads and ornaments, as well as the ownership of ‘mithuns’ (bos frontalis) eastern Himalayan free range cattle, and they practice slash and burn agriculture known as ‘jhum’ on the steep hillsides that surround their villages. They speak their own Nyishi language as well as some Assamese and Hindi, although the state official language is English, now spoken by some younger people as well.

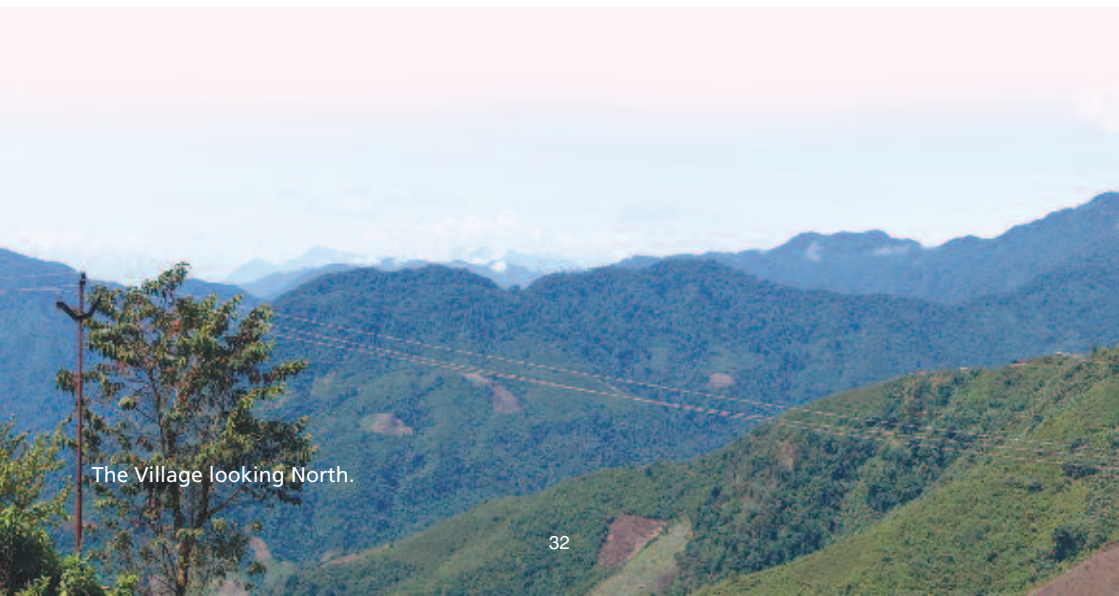
Since the mid nineteenth century many Nepalis known as Gurkhas in the case of soldiers migrated to NE India, where there were attractive opportunities to clear land to farm, or become soldiers, policemen, estate workers and porters and so these provided the soldiers and the initial porters for the Mission as was the case in many other colonial campaigns or missions in NE India.

Today China continues to claim large parts of Arunachal Pradesh including Tali.



The Tali Village Headman,  
Tigio Tagang and his wife Yapa.

There was substantial violence at election time in 2019. It was the largest constituency in India without a road until then. An election team were dropped in Tali by helicopter, but on their return journey they were lost for a month and eventually returned on foot, exhausted and starving but keeping safe their precious ballot boxes. The BJP party has strong local support, surprisingly for an area where the majority are not Hindus.



The Village looking North.

Today the village of Tali remains isolated and is no Shangri-la! For the people, it is a hard subsistence life with poor health, high infant mortality and the nearest hospital is 120 km away. Life is beginning to change with the provision of a road to the area and bridge across the Kamla River 3,000 feet below the village (although this will need to be replaced after a recent landslide). There is one government telephone in the village, but mobile phones will change this soon. In 2018, everything still had to be carried up to the village by porters (often women, as the men have gone away to find work) including the supplies of Pepsi Cola which leaves a legacy of rubbish, poor nutrition and dental decay.

The Nyishi deaths and a few Gurkha and porter deaths from accidents are mourned, but there was a further sad postscript. Captain Graham and his intelligence officer, Captain Beauchamp Duff of the 1st Gurkhas, both sons of

Generals, were killed in action in the early months of WW1, while seconded to the 2/2 Gurkha Rifles in France. They are commemorated with no known graves at Neuve Chapelle Commonwealth War Cemetery.

Of the other expedition members, Mr Kerwood took early retirement in 1923 and the surveyor in the party Lt C G Lewis rose to be the Surveyor-General of India in 1937 and was later knighted.

The Tali Nyishi successfully repulsed a British Colonial incursion and remained ungoverned except within their own clan traditions for another nearly 50 years, until post-colonial India became concerned again with their frontiers with communist China. Colonialism did not always prevail and indeed there are parts of the uplands in this part of the world that preserved an 'ungoverned' existence until well into our own lifetimes.

**Christine Standing**



# Amersham Museum News

2020 has been incredibly challenging, both personally and professionally. There has been so much that we have lost, emotionally and materially. As I write this, Margaret Keenan is the first person to receive a Covid-19 vaccine. I hope that we can all begin, albeit cautiously, to look ahead to more positive and settled times in 2021.

I'm generally a positive person, I try to see the best in everything and everyone. At the museum, my approach to dealing with Covid has been to focus on what we can do and not what we can't. It's much easier to have that mentality when supported by such a wonderful, positive and supportive team of volunteers.

The museum, alongside all other arts venues, has suffered from two lockdowns this year, from the end of March until July and then again in November. Once I returned to work in the summer – albeit part-time – I worked with our trustees to put a series of measures in place to ensure that the museum was Covid-secure. We also talked to our volunteers about our plans to ensure they were happy. We re-opened the museum in August and offered a programme of guided walks, which ran from the summer to the point we were forced to close again. We received a grant from the Arts Council which helped to make the museum ready for re-opening and included the development of an online booking system and an online shop. This has worked really well, with regular bookings for museum visits through the site. The online shop has been a positive development and we've received orders for museum branded goods from all over England as well as from other parts of the world!



Initially, we had to remove all of the interactive elements from the museum that used to make it such a special place to be. Over the last couple of months, we have tried to think how to restore the museum as a multi-sensory place, whilst also minimising what can be touched or picked up. I've had some great input from volunteers about how to achieve this. Currently we're focusing on the Tudor Room. Having removed all the dressing up, table laying and writing interactives, we're instead introducing small changes including smells with herbs, sounds with music and movement through projections. We've also produced some new labels.

Either side of the lockdowns our collections volunteers have been returning to the museum, in socially distanced groups. They have helped to catch up with cataloguing and labelling projects; we were offered several donations of photographs and documents during lockdown. They have also helped to check our pest traps, a particularly important job when the museum has had such a long closure. Others have remained at home and undertaken research into diverse topics, including life in Tudor Amersham and the campaign for the abolition of slavery.

So much of what we do in the museum is delivering specific projects for older people, children and schools. All of these projects had to stop during lockdown and we've spent the last few months building them back up, or finding ways to deliver them in a socially distanced way. Our Reminiscence at Home project, which matches trained volunteers to work with older people in

their homes and record their life stories, is needed now more than ever. We are running the project again, but volunteers are listening to people's stories over the phone or via video on a smartphone. We've also been sending loan boxes out to care homes, enabling care home staff to stimulate residents at a time when contact with the outside world is so limited.



Similarly, we've sent our handling boxes – with themed items from our collection – out to primary and secondary schools throughout this term. Some of our volunteers have helped to write notes and suggested teaching activities for the boxes; mostly we use these objects to teach sessions ourselves. We've also managed to continue to deliver our Heritage Fund and Ernest Cook Charitable Trust supported project, Understanding the Central Chilterns. We've been dropping curriculum themed boxes to local schools, each of which focuses on the human settlement of the Chilterns and a particular era, such as Pre-History or Saxons. The school then receives an online taught session, using the objects that have been delivered to the school. This has proven really popular and we've just asked our funders if we can deliver more sessions.



Moving online has been a solution for many clubs and societies this year and it's been a big learning curve for all of us. This autumn we re-launched our children's art club, with an online offer. It's been a great success with the children studying a short course on typography, which has drawn inspiration from examples of different fonts on objects and in documents in the museum. In January we will continue the Club and launch a new course for adults, supported by the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust.

The course, developed and delivered by Missenden Arts Club for the museum, will explore the life and key paintings of 20th century expressionist artist Marie-Louise von Motesiczky. Concurrently, students are given the opportunity to look at the different architectural styles found in the buildings of Amersham, with which Motesiczky would have been familiar. Motesiczky (1906 –1996) lived in Amersham during the 1940s and spent weekends in the town until the 1970s.



Dorothy

The museum was recently given three of her paintings by the Charitable Trust set up in her name.

The course costs £25 and will run online on Thursday mornings,

10.30am – 12.30pm on 14th, 21st and 28th January and 4th, 11th and 25th February and 11th March.

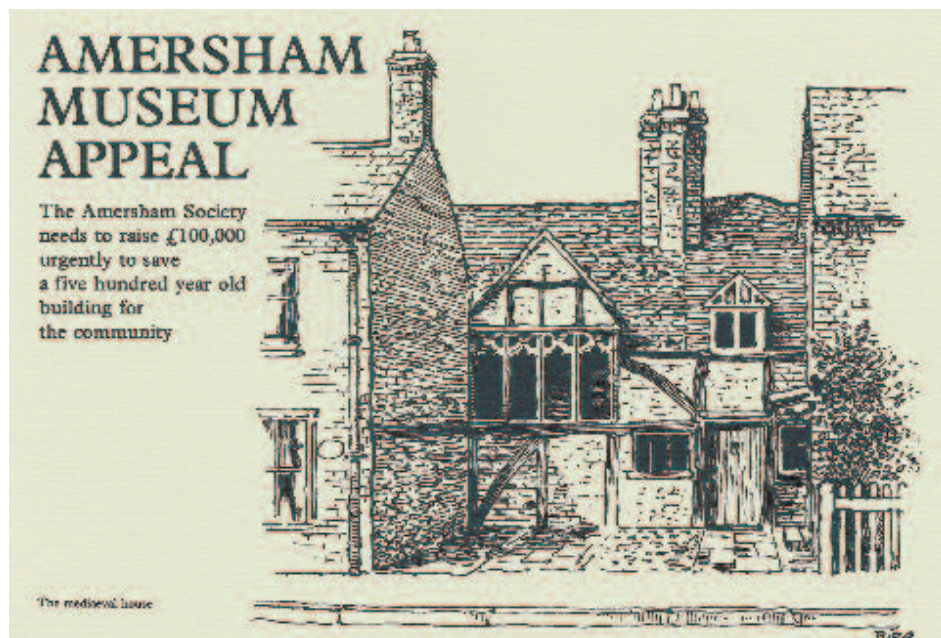
To find out more email

[emily@amershammuseum.org](mailto:emily@amershammuseum.org)

My attention is now turning to 2021. We are planning cautiously for what the year might look like and we're expecting

social distancing to remain for quite some time. In spite of the necessary restrictions there is space to be creative and innovative. For the museum, 2021 is a special birthday; we will be 30 years old. The Amersham Society gathered the initial collection for the museum and worked tirelessly to find a space where it could be permanently displayed. Having secured 49 High Street in the early 1980s, many people put in a tremendous amount of work to restore the medieval building and create the displays to house a museum collection, with Amersham Museum finally opening in 1991. Our plans to celebrate this special birthday include: a project to interview those involved in setting the museum up; a wider oral history project about people's memories of moving to the area; and an arts-led project that brings some of the older people we work with, together with the children and young people from our Art Club and Young Curators programmes. I very much hope that we will be able to realise these ideas and that you will be able to participate and celebrate with us.

Other plans for 2021 include the development of new guided walks of the local area and some activities in our garden celebrating local crafts, artists and the plants we grow. We are also hoping to create a new exhibition focusing on life before plastic. Working with a community group, Sustainable Amersham, we hope to look at the ways people shopped and lived in the past, when reduce, reuse and recycle was a way of life. The exhibition will be housed in Anthony, our Mobile Museum and possibly in a venue in Amersham-on-the-



Appeal leaflet produced by the Amersham Society in 1984, to encourage people to make donations to support the purchase and restoration of 49 High Street. The leaflet was illustrated by Val Biro and designed by John Wallis.

Hill. It would be wonderful to hear your memories of how you or your parents used to shop without plastic, or the ways and means they employed at home to minimise waste.

Much of our suffering this year has come from being forced to be apart. For some of us that has resulted in isolation and loneliness, whatever our age. One of the greatest strengths of the museum is its sense of togetherness; a place created by people – the Amersham

Society – for others to deposit their stories and for people to enjoy. I am determined that we will continue to find ways to come together safely in 2021 and I very much hope that we can celebrate our birthday together. I wish you all the best and hope you have had a restful and happy Christmas.

To find out more go to:

[www.amershammuseum.org](http://www.amershammuseum.org)

or email

[emily@amershammuseum.org](mailto:emily@amershammuseum.org)

Towards the end of December we were thrilled to hear that the museum has been given the Sandford Award for heritage education. The award recognises high quality formal education programmes, run at heritage sites across Britain. The judges made these comments about Amersham Museum: Amersham Museum is a fantastic community resource which offers a professional, engaging learning programme. Its particular strength is a focus on local history using archive material and objects to explain the development of Amersham over time. The Museum staff have developed a fantastic relationship with local schools which is reflected in the number of repeat visits and strength of the programme.

# NOTICEBOARD

## Programme of Talks

The first talks of the year listed below will be by Zoom.  
The meetings are held on the last Wednesday of the month  
and open at 7.45pm. The talks start promptly at 8.00pm.

- January 27th **7 Days of Birding**  
A talk by Nick Prentice will take us on a  
virtual tour of several continents.
- February 24th **A Brief History of Bible Translation**  
David Morgan from Wycliffe Bible Translators  
surveys bible translation history up to the time  
of the Lollards.
- March 31st **Brewers of Amersham**  
A talk by historian Julian Hunt covering  
the 17th to the 20th century.
- April 28th **Rural Clothing**  
A talk by a member of the Amersham Museum.
- May 26th **Amersham Festival of Music**  
Iain Ledingham, founder of the Festival, will  
talk about some of his favourite pieces of  
music from Bach and Mozart to Cole Porter.

### Amersham Society Officers

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

Website <https://amershamsociety.org>

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