



May 2021

**AMERSHAM SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER**



The former Weller's brewery building. See report by Mark Ladd on page 22.



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Cover and inside cover photographs by Elena Morgan.

Report from the Chair

As we were going to press we sadly learned of the death of Martin Read on the 3rd May. He was a hugely active member of the Society over many years and a mention of his most recent contribution to this year's Twelfth Night Revels is included in this Newsletter. All our thoughts and sympathies go to Laurette and their children and grandchildren. He will be missed terribly by us all.

Winter, always dark, cold and damp has seemed to many of us rather worse and muddier than usual. But now as I write this we have had a long spell of dry weather, gardeners and farmers are wishing for more rain and the country is gradually, emerging cautiously from this strange and long period of lockdown. And thankfully the vaccination programme continues to make good progress and most people that I have spoken with have been delighted to have received their vaccination. They have also been very thankful for the calm and efficient way that our local medical practices and the NHS have organised the programme and are working their way through the very large number of people who have received or are about to receive their vaccinations.

It has been good to experience some return to *"normal"* life during April, with the possibility of visiting family and friends in their gardens again, or visiting restaurants and pubs for al fresco meals and drinks, for children able to return to their schools, churches to open for worship again and non-essential shops allowed to open. During lockdown many people have enjoyed their daily exercise, mainly walking, cycling or gardening and have discovered some lovely places right on their doorstep. And in these troubled times the Amersham Society Committee has been conscious of the importance of keeping in touch with our members, through our talks, the Newsletter, the regular e-alerts and of course the website.

We have been very pleased that membership numbers have remained fairly steady, with some new subscribers. You will see that there is an article in the Newsletter by Peter Borrowes about subscriptions, when they should be paid and how much they are.

A year ago as the pandemic started to hit home, we took our first tentative steps towards meetings on Zoom, a totally unfamiliar method of communicating for many of us. But now I am pleased to say that after a year of practice the talks have been well attended and most members seem to join without difficulty and certainly look very relaxed as they listen and then join in the question and answer sessions and chat with other members afterwards. And here I must again thank Lena Morgan for the efficient way in which she organises the talk evenings, making contact with the speakers a week or more beforehand to make sure that they understand what is expected of them and then, on the chosen evening, making sure that everything goes smoothly. And because it does go so smoothly some may be fooled into thinking that it is a simple procedure. It is most definitely not!

The Events team, Geraldine Marshall-Andrew, Yvonne Suckling and I always try to make sure that the talks cover a wide selection of topics, including many about local subjects or in connection with an anniversary. This year has been no exception as so far we have covered:

Birding on several continents, A Brief History of Bible Translation, The Brewers of Amersham and Rural Work Wear. We are glad, indeed usually very grateful, when one of you offers or can be persuaded to write an article on a talk for publication in the Newsletter. It is really interesting to have the different styles and does help to spread the load. And if you know of a good speaker, or have heard a good talk recently, do let us know for future programmes.

We do not of course know how the Corona Virus will behave during the rest of the year. This makes organising the programme a bit difficult and does mean that we may have to give you details of a planned activity, such as the outing, with a much shorter lead time than usual. There is a notice in the Newsletter about a possible outing to Winchester in September. It would be useful to have your views on whether you would like an outing this year, provided that it is safe to organise one.

And now I would like to wish you all a relaxing and safe summer wherever you spend it. We are fortunate to have so many lovely and interesting places to visit in this country. And I look forward to seeing you at our talk on 26th May, given by Iain Ledingham about some of his favourite pieces of music. It will be our last talk before the summer break so do try to join us.

Dorothy Symes

Winchester and the Gurkha Museum

It is not yet clear whether we shall be able to organise an outing later this year. It will depend on whether it is considered safe to make coach trips and visit Museums and also of course whether members would be interested in having an outing this year.

The outing we have in mind would be to Winchester. Former Chairman of the Amersham Society Martin Brooks is a Trustee of the Gurkha Museum, which is in central Winchester. He has offered to arrange for a group from the Amersham Society to have a tour of the Museum in the morning and, for those that would like this, to stay for a curry lunch or an alternative meal, after the visit. The afternoon would then be free to visit Winchester town and the Cathedral.

The outing would probably be during the second or third week in September. Social distancing and mask wearing are still likely to be in force, which would limit our number.

If an outing is possible and we can arrange this safely would members be interested in taking part? We shall not be able to provide details of the arrangements or costs until June when many of the current regulations are scheduled to end. But it would be helpful to know whether in principal you might be interested in joining the group for a coach trip to Winchester.

It would be good to hear from you:
by email to: symes196@btinternet.com
or by note to: 160b High Street, Amersham, HP7 0EG.

Dorothy Symes

7 DAYS OF BIRDING

Report on a talk by NICK PRENTICE



Andean
cock-of-the-rock

Our talk on 27th January was about birds and conservation in various continents of the world. Nick Prentice is an enthusiastic birder with over 20 years' experience, and has served on several conservation projects around the world. He has been active in conservation – particularly with BirdLife International – and has served on the Global Council and on the board of a Rainforest Project in Sumatra, and is also a trustee of the South Georgia Heritage Trust in the South Atlantic.

He delighted us with his riveting narrative on birdlife, taking in a week of birdwatching in different continents, with his wife Jane who is an enthusiastic photographer. In his talk he highlighted several conservation issues and explained how conservation is helping birdlife across the globe.

Nick explained that he enjoyed birdwatching because it got him to the most incredible places in the wilderness, where he was able to observe astonishing bird behaviour, and also because he enjoyed listing the number of birds he saw on his travels. He said there were roughly 10,500 species of birds in the world, of which he'd seen 4,800 species. According to him, around 15% of birds are endangered because of various pressures, including from agriculture required to feed populations, which results in a risk to biodiversity. Birds are also key indicators of habitat viability, Nick said, and if they prosper, the whole eco-system is doing well and, if not, it will be on the decline.

The photographs
in this article were
all supplied by
Nick Prentice.



Toco toucan

SOUTH AMERICA

Day 1, Mindo Valley, Ecuador:

Nick started off in Ecuador, South America. He explained that South America is very much the continent of birds, as over half of the world's species are found there. And he called Ecuador the capital of birding because 16% of the world's species are found in Ecuador. He said this was due to altitudinal variations and a multitude of habitats, such as cloud forests, mountains, and the Amazon basin. In what is a great example of conservation, Nick told us of Angel Paz, a local farmer who formerly used to cut down woodland for revenue,

but who came across the beautiful Andean Cock-of-the-rock bird which displays in a 'lek' of males, in the hope of attracting a mate. Angel found there was more revenue to be gained by leading birdwatching trips to see this superb bird, and as a result that part of the forest became protected. In South America, he also saw antpittas, hoatzins (aka stinkbird), toucans, tufted coquettes (a type of hummingbird) and tanagers, which are colourful songbirds and a great potoo, a nightbird with a superb camouflage. Nick explained that eco-tourism brings in a lot of revenue to South American countries.



Day 2, Salisbury Plain, South Georgia:

As chairman of the South Georgia Heritage Trust, this is Nick's favourite place on the planet. South Georgia is a sub-Antarctic island and a British Overseas Territory which was first discovered by Captain Cook in 1775. There are 20 000 - metre peaks, and the main tourist season is the austral summer from October to March. The main issue of conservation there said Nick was the removal of invasive species such as rats in order to protect wildlife, which was completed by SGHT in 2015. Nick showed us a slide of the wandering albatross, a bird which has the largest wingspan in the world, and the South Georgia pipit, the southern-most song-bird in the world, which would have gone extinct had it not been for the rat-eradication project. Currently there are 16 million breeding seabirds on South Georgia, including petrels, terns, skuas, shags and 4 species of penguins.

NORTH AMERICA Day 3, Pinnacles National Park, California USA:

Nick saw the California condor which is the largest bird of prey in North America, and which is a great example of the captive breeding programme introduced there. Originally there were 5 species of North American condor, but 4 became extinct and they captured all 22 remaining birds and bred them in captivity, and \$100 million and 35 years later there are now 300 birds in the wild, with 200 still in captivity. The main problem explained Nick, is humans and the use of lead shot ammunition for hunting. California has now introduced legislation to ban lead shot ammunition.

In terms of bird families in North America, Nick also saw wild turkeys in Boston which are quite common now that they're no longer hunted, and common garden birds like the cardinal, which is a bright red bird (male) and can be popularly seen on Christmas cards.

He also saw the great northern diver, commonly known in America as the loon, which has stunning black and white plumage and an incredibly eerie wailing call.

EUROPE

Day 4, Svalbaard, Norway:

Nick told us about a trip to Svalbaard in Northern Europe where he saw a whale carcass which had come to the surface of the ice in the warmth of the June sun, and that attracted 13 polar bears including a female and her cub, which was threatened by a large male which was seen off by the mother polar bear. They also saw an ivory gull which Nick likened to being a vulture of the North, and it had flown in to feed on the carrion which was the whale carcass. They then went on a trip to an offshore island where they saw auks, puffins and also little auks, which numbered 100,000 nesting birds. Nick actually likened it to Heathrow on a busy day!



Great northern diver (loon)

The highlight of conservation in Svalbaard is the Global Seedbank at Nyalesund, where over a million seed samples are stored from countries all over the world. The site was chosen because of the temperature in the tundra, which was ideal for seed storage. In Europe, Nick also saw bird families like ruddy turnstones, flamingos, white storks, and nightjars, a nocturnal bird that feeds on insects.



Mother polar bear with cub facing off male bear



Ruddy turnstone

AFRICA

Day 5, Bankro Village, Ghana:

West Africa is definitely somewhere where all birdwatchers want to go said Nick, and Ghana is a beautiful country with friendly people, good road communications and beautiful forests. He started off with an apocryphal tale of the Egyptian plover, which was known as the tooth-picker for crocodiles, and showed a slide of a photoshopped bird in the open jaws of a crocodile! He then showed a slide of picathartes gymnocephalus, a Disney-type bird which had been considered extinct in Ghana, until a young student in the 50's took a drawing of it to some villagers who identified the bird and took him to see the bird. And to illustrate an example of conservation, the villagers have now turned guardian of this bird, and charge people money to take them to see it.

On a two-hour hike through the forest, Nick saw the mud nest of this bird and waited to see them. Unfortunately, he was drenched due to a tropical shower, but he did finally see four birds hopping around. We also saw a short clip of David Attenborough narrating how he and his team became the first Europeans to see the white-necked picathartes.

Nick also saw weaver birds, carmine bee-eaters, red-billed oxpeckers which groom the megafauna such as giraffes, a Marshall eagle which is the largest bird of prey in Africa (we saw a slide of an eagle feasting on a warthog piglet which it had killed), an African wood owl, a lilac-breasted roller, a Kori bustard which is the largest flying bird native to Africa and the secretary bird, with quill-like crest feathers, rather reminiscent of an 18th-century secretary, according to Nick!

Crocodile and Egyptian plover





Oxpecker

Bornean
bristlehead

ASIA

Day 6, Sepilok, Sabah, Malaysia:

Nick and Jane headed to the jungles of Borneo in Sabah in northern Malaysia, just west of the Wallace line*. The main conservation issue here is agriculture, and de-forestation in order to grow the oil palm which is a cash crop and a source of revenue. The good news Nick said is that there exists a 100-metre rule, which prohibits the clearing of forests within 100 metres of a river or significant stream. This ensures that there's still a lot

of wildlife to see. Nick saw 4 mammals on his trip: the silver langur, the orang utan, the proboscis monkey, and the Asian elephant, and had a lucky nocturnal sighting of a male clouded leopard. The single bird species that Nick had come to see however, was the Bornean Bristlehead, a bird of the rainforest canopy which he luckily saw on his last day there, feeding on a praying mantis. He also saw the Hoopoe, which we sometimes see here in southern England, and a beautiful Whiskered Tree-swift



Whiskered treeswift

which was nesting on a thin twig. The bird chooses such a nest site to deter tree-squirrels, as the branch would easily break if these predators decided to visit the nest.

**Alfred Wallace was a contemporary of Darwin, and he noticed that in Australia and New Guinea there were completely different mammals and birds east of what is the Wallace line, than to the west of the line.*

What Wallace worked out was that the continents were drifting towards each other, and the Wallace line separates the Austral-Papuan avifauna from the South-East Asian side. In other words, the line marked the boundary between the animal life of the Australian region and that of Asia.

Day 7, Waigeo, Indonesia:

Waigeo is an island off New Guinea, on the eastern side of the Wallace line. Nick went there to see the Wilson's Bird of Paradise, an intriguing bird which has a colourful and exotic appearance which he'd wanted to see since childhood. They set off as early as 4.15 am, to make the best of the day of birding

and snorkelling. They came upon the bird in the forest doing a bit of house-keeping, and Nick showed us a videoclip of this, and we could hear the bird calling.

Nick also showed us some photos of a Papuan frogmouth, an owlet nightjar, a kia which is an Alpine parrot on the South Island of New Zealand, and he finished with a photo of a bird from the avocet and stilt family, the Black Stilt, of which there are less than a hundred left.

Nick updated us on his planned trips to the Tibetan Plateau, New Mexico and to India, which sadly have not yet happened, but he said he still had about 10 years' worth of trips to look forward to!

It was a wonderful whistle-stop trip, packed with stunning photos and an enthralling narrative of exotic birdlife which really transported us from grey, wintry Britain to wonderful, tropical sunny lands, and also taught us a bit about conservation and its benefits to environments (such as those in Ecuador, South Georgia, and Ghana) which were hitherto endangered.

Charmaine Augustine

The Wellerman

Article by Peter Borrowes

It is likely that not many readers of this *Newsletter* are enthusiastic fans of the social medium platform TikTok, which allows users to share short (usually 1 minute) personal videos, commonly dancing or stand-up comedy. In the latter half of 2020 and early 2021 singing became popular and especially sea shanties. One that was particularly trendy was *The Wellerman* ^{1,2,3} (a recording is available on Youtube at <https://youtu.be/4uukiGqUdzg>). This is where the Amersham connection comes in, because the Weller referred to in the title of this shanty was part of the Amersham brewing family.

Joseph Weller (1766 -1856) was the 4th son of William Weller (1727-1802), the founder of the brewing dynasty. Joseph became a brewer along with brothers John (1760-1843) and William (1763-1843) but he suffered from consumption (tuberculosis) and was advised to move to a warmer coastal climate. Joseph had married Mary Brooks in Aylesbury in 1801. His first son, Joseph Brooks Weller was baptised in Amersham in September 1802 and the next one, George Weller, in January 1806 but they moved to Folkestone soon afterwards because one daughter, Mary Brooks Weller, was baptised there in September 1807, another, Anne Meek Weller in February 1817 and the third son, Edward, in July 1814.

The two older brothers made separate exploratory visits to Australia in the 1820s and on their return seem to have persuaded the family of the money to be made in Australia – plus a healthier climate for their father. The two younger sons, Joseph Brooks and Edward, returned to Australia in 1829, followed by their father Joseph in 1830 with his wife and daughters and accompanied by George and his (new) wife. Joseph senior had sold his estate in Kent, apparently for a considerable sum of money and this formed the basis for setting up what became a profitable shipping and whaling business in New South Wales. George seems to have been the more staid of the brothers and became the mainstay of the Sydney operation when the more adventurous Joseph Brooks and Edward set out for New Zealand in their whaler Lucy Anne in late 1831 to set up a shore whaling station ^{4,5 6}.

Traditionally, the brothers are said to have landed at what is now called Weller's Rock (Te Umu Kuri), in Otago Harbour, at the head of which lies the city of Dunedin. They set up a settlement there, which became the centre of a network of 7 whaling stations. It was burnt down in 1832 but soon rebuilt. At times they had 85 men employed at Otago alone and with their wives and children this would have been

a substantial community. As well as whaling there was shipbuilding, farming and trading in flax, fish and preserved Maori heads.

Edward had relationships with Maori women in a local village. The first was with Paparu, daughter of Tahatu and Matua. They had one daughter, Fanny, born in 1835 or 1836. By 1839 he was living with Nikuru Taiaroa, daughter of Taiaroa and Hine-i-whariua Taiaroa. Edward's second daughter, Nani Weller (Hana Wera), was born probably in 1840; her mother died shortly afterwards. Nani's son, Tom Ellison, was a noted rugby footballer and visited England on a tour. Edward had been kidnapped by Maoris in 1833 and had to be ransomed and a later confrontation led the Wellers to acquire some heavy arms. A measles epidemic in 1835 killed off many of the Maori population. However, the Wellers are seen to have been successful in establishing a good working relationship with the Maori and they played an important part in the history of the South Island. The University of Otago has extensive records of the Wellers and the development of the whaling industry.

When Joseph died of tuberculosis in 1835 Edward shipped his remains back to Sydney in a barrel of rum, where brother George was in charge of the family business. Edward remained in New Zealand and was clearly a forceful character. Back in Sydney, the family built up a successful

The Wellerman

There once was a ship that put to sea,
And the name of that ship was the Billy o' Tea
The winds blew hard, her bow dipped down,
Blow, me bully boys, blow!

Chorus (after each verse):

(HUH!)

*Soon may the Wellerman come
to bring us sugar and tea and rum.*

*One day, when the tonguing' is done,
We'll take our leave and go.*

She had not been two weeks from shore
When down on her a right whale bore.
The captain called all hands and swore
He'd take that whale in tow.

{Chorus}

Before the boat had hit the water
The whale's tail came up and caught her.
All hands to the side, harpooned and fought her,
When she dived down below.

{Chorus}

No line was cut, no whale was freed,
An' the captain's mind was not on greed!
But he belonged to the Whaleman's creed
She took that ship in tow.

{Chorus}

For forty days or even more,
the line went slack then tight once more,
All boats were lost, there were only four
and still that whale did go.

{Chorus}

As far as I've heard, the fight's still on,
The line's not cut, and the whale's not gone!
The Wellerman makes his regular call
to encourage the captain, crew and all!

{Chorus x 2 til Finish}

business of supplying whaling stations with the essential provisions, including rum, tea and sugar (as in the sea shanty). At one point, the Wellers tried to ship their whale oil direct to London, while still claiming the exemption from duty allowed to oil taken by British



Edward Weller : 1814 – 1893

ships but this was not allowed and they had to revert to shipping through Sydney. At one point in these negotiations George was ready to give up the New Zealand operation but Edward revealed his obstinacy by going to great lengths to keep it running, at least for the time being. Unscrupulous competition and a declining harvest of whales did cause financial problems for the Wellers and in order to compensate for this they began large-scale land purchases. These were queried by the Governor of New South Wales (who at that time was responsible to the British Government for activities in New Zealand) and disallowed in 1841. However, in December 1840 Edward left New Zealand, leaving Charles Schultze as manager of the business. Although the whole business went bankrupt in 1842 Charles and a partner bought the Otago operation and it continued to flourish and contributed significantly to the growth of the City of Dunedin. Charles later married Edward's sister Anne Weller. Edward had taken

personal command of one of the whaleboats, despite the anxieties of brother George and at one point the firm earned about £8,000 in 10 months from whaling alone. After returning to Sydney, Edward seems to have spent his life rather quietly as a Victorian colonial squire in up-country New South Wales although his

daughter Nani did stay with him for some time until she became homesick. He died in March 1893 but his obstinacy did kill him in the end. As floodwaters rose round his house in Maitland, he refused to leave and to escape the rising waters he knocked a hole in the ceiling and climbed into the roof space, where he eventually died of exposure and exhaustion.

It is easy to forget these days that whale oil was a mainstay of the industrial revolution in the first half of the 19th century. Just as the Amersham branch of the family were a major force and significant employers as brewers, the antipodean branch seems to have been equally forceful in the whaling and provision business. The shanty tells the story of whalers waiting for the arrival of the supply ship, *The Wellerman*, i.e. a ship from the Weller supply company in Sydney.

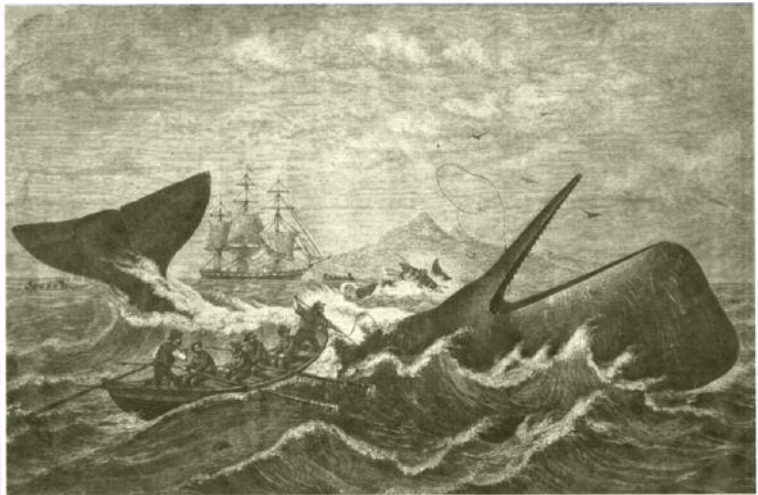
Interestingly, the sugar and rum they were so eagerly awaiting might well have been supplied with the help of cousins of the three brothers, Joseph,

'A banger': The tale of the sea shanty storming TikTok

Elle Hunt

John Archer caught wind of the sea shanty revival before anyone else. From his home in landlocked Chalfont, Archer had noticed a sharp rise in visitors to the New Zealand Folk Song website that he set up in 1996. One 19th-century seafaring epic was of particular interest: *Soon May the Wellerman Come*.

Views of Archer's highly detailed, lovingly compiled entry for the shanty unexpectedly spiked in late September, with most coming from the US. "I thought, 'that's strange,'" says Archer, a former schoolteacher who first set up New Zealand Folk Song as a teaching resource. "I knew



Antipodes, and tells of a pivotal point in the history of Australia and New Zealand.

A "Wellerman" was an employee of the Sydney-based Weller Brothers' shipping company, which from 1833 was the major supplier of provisions – such as the "sugar and tea and rum" of the shanty's refrain

refers to the practice of stripping blubber from beached whales.

The brothers Joseph Brooks and George and Edward Weller emigrated from Folkestone, Kent, to Sydney, New South Wales, in 1823 and within 10 years had established themselves as merchant traders.

At the time, whaling was a prime

makes his regular call, to encourage the Captain, crew and all".

Archer suggests it is the shanty's "cheerful energy and hopeful outlook" – in contrast to other more "dreary" whaling songs – that has led to Wellerman's rediscovery.

"My guess is that Covid lockdowns have put millions

on settling in Australia then passed it down within his family.

From there, the shanty is believed to have spread around the world by its inclusion in Colquhoun's book *Songs of a Young Country*, published in England in 1972. "I was singing it with others in folk clubs 40 years ago," says Archer.

The Guardian 16 January 2021

George and Edward Weller, i.e., Henry Weller (1788 -1815) and John Lacey Weller (1790 -1823) or their descendants who were working in Jamaica at the time ⁷. However, is it just speculation that the obstinate captain who harpoons the whale in the shanty and won't cut the line even when the whale tows the ship day after day is based on the rather obstinate Edward?

Interestingly, in 1842 the American Hermann Melville (author of *Moby-Dick*) joined the whaler *Lucy Anne* (the Weller vessel the brothers sailed for New Zealand in) on the Marquesas Islands, whence he sailed to Tahiti. Was Edward also the inspiration for Captain Ahab? We may disapprove of whaling these days, but at least in the shanty the whale won.

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- 6 http://tomswhakapapa.co.nz/brons_family_history_092.htm
- 7 <https://amershammuseum.org/history/people/17th-18th-centuries/the-weller-family/weller-family-connections-with-jamaica/>



Michael Brooks is third on the left in the 1944 winning boat.

Dr Michael Brooks and the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race 1944



Over the years many interesting and talented people have lived in or near Amersham and Michael Brooks is included among these. He lived in the Old Town for many years, was an active member of the Amersham Society and often contributed his well researched articles for publication in our Newsletter. And as some members will also know Michael rowed for Oxford in the wartime Oxford and Cambridge Boat Races of 1943 and 1944. His team won on both occasions!

Photographs courtesy of Jane Josten,
Michael Brooks' granddaughter.

During the gloomy and difficult days of World War 2, when Britain was under fierce attack, Winston Churchill agreed that the Boat Race would be good for morale and should be held. At this time London was under threat and the race could not take place on the Thames as usual. It was therefore decided that the race should take place on a stretch of the Great River Ouse near Ely. And on that occasion about 5,000 people watched the exciting race from the river bank.

This year for the first time since the Second World War and of course for entirely different reasons, (*the Corona Virus Pandemic and ongoing repairs to Hammersmith Bridge*), the men's Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race had to be relocated again. The same stretch of the Great River Ouse, where the race was last held in 1944, was again chosen.

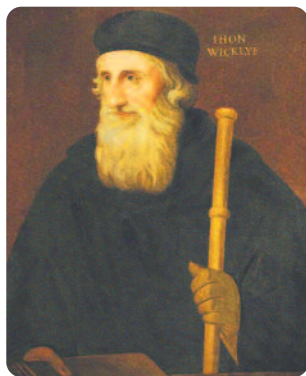
Before the start of this year's Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race the BBC team, led by Dan Snow, wanted to describe to viewers how the race had been relocated and was again rowed on the same stretch of river as had been chosen during the war. Sadly none of those in the two crews who rowed in the 1944 race were still alive, but the BBC were keen to interview relatives of a crew member from each



team. Dan Snow knew of Michael Brooks' connection with Amersham and consulted the Amersham Society for our help in contacting Michael's family. And fortunately thanks to one of our members who knew Michael's daughter, we were able to contact Jane and put her in touch with Dan Snow's team. As a result viewers of the BBC programme were treated to a special riverside interview by Dan Snow before the Race when he spoke with Jane about Michael. The daughter of one of the Cambridge Crew members, Martin Whitworth, also spoke. Jane explained that soon after the 1944 Race a close friend of her father's had been killed in action and Michael had decided to leave his medical studies and join the army, the Rifle Brigade. He was sent to Palestine and did not return to Oxford to resume his work there until 1948.

Dorothy Symes

A Brief History of Bible Translation



John Wycliffe by T. Kirkby.

Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

Shortly after Lena and I first came to live in Amersham in 2010, we saw the production of the Martyrs' Play in St Mary's Church. Subsequently I had a conversation with my brother, David, who was working for the Wycliffe Bible Translators, at the time, in Horsley's Green, just outside High Wycombe. I noted that everyone in Amersham seemed to know of John Wycliffe and the Lollards. One would have difficulty finding a place more receptive to knowing a little more about the man who had inspired the name and ethos of the organisation for which he had been working for so many years. The Quincentenary, this year, of the trial of the last six Martyrs seemed an ideal juncture to put that to the test. So it was, David agreed to speak to the Society about John Wycliffe.

The Society's February lecture was thus designed to put some of the background to Wycliffe and the history of Bible Translation. With the broadest sweep of history covering the 2000 years leading to 1521, David gave an illuminating and well illustrated view as to how and why people wanted to read, understand and appreciate the biblical text in the vernacular.

He recounted that well before Christ, the Hebrew texts of the Old Testament Bible had been translated for the Jewish diaspora around the Eastern Mediterranean into Greek and Aramaic. The idea that God's word could be translated, first dates from the Jews return from the exile in Babylon in about 520 BC.

Unlike the sacred texts of Judaism or Islam, Christian religious practice uniquely did not put weight on reciting or learning tracts of a holy book and thus over the course of the millennia after Christ the translation of both Old and New Testament into more and more languages was widespread. David's maps showed how scholars translated down the Nile to the Copts, the Nubians and as far as the Ethiopians; across Syria, up to the Armenians and the Georgians; and back up the Silk Route, parts of the bible were even translated into Chinese. The culmination of these efforts was when Saint Jerome in Rome was commissioned to translate the whole Bible into Latin at the behest of Pope Damasus I. This importantly led to a new and complete Latin version of the Bible, the Vulgate, by 405AD.

Up in the top left corner of David's maps of the mediterranean were the British Isles, part of the Roman Empire, and part of Christendom. The second half of the talk focused in on how the spread of translation arrived on these shores. From an Amersham centric view of the world we could imagine this tide of history swept from Babylonia to Alexandria to Tyre to Rome inexorably closer to home.

Although the Venerable Bede translated the Gospel of St John into Old English from the Vulgate as early as 730AD, it was not until the 14th century that matters aligned to give the impetus for the first full translation into English, again from Jerome's Latin, by John Wycliffe.

War and Plague were of course great motivators for this change. The Hundred Years War meant that there was a political need to stress Englishness and the Black Death caused social upheaval and a feeling of a new order. The resultant Peasants Revolt of 1381, although largely caused by high taxes had a radical religious element to it as well.

Simultaneously, the last decades of the century saw the birth of the first literary works in Middle English - Langland and Chaucer - an important step in English national identity. This necessarily marks the passing of Anglo-Norman (Norman French) as the language of the English aristocracy and the law. But this socio-linguistic revolution also impacted the use of Latin by the Church and the universities.

John Wycliffe (c1320 – 1384), the so-called Morning Star of the English Reformation, was Master of Balliol College in Oxford in the 1360s and had as a patron, John of Gaunt, father of the future Henry IV. However, Wycliffe's progressive views against church corruption and support of literacy in English did not fit well with the inevitable backlash from the fear of chaos fuelled by the peasants revolt.

Wycliffe was forced to retire from Oxford in the last years of his life, to Leicestershire, where he directed the dissemination of his bible through a network of literate 'poor priests' who variously preached, read texts out to congregations and made further transcriptions of Wycliffe's work. It was this group that became known disparagingly as the Lollards and under increasing persecution they continued their work for more than a century.



Wycliffe Giving 'The Poor Priests'
His Translation of the Bible by W.F. Yeames.



The Great Bible 1539 – 1534



John Wycliffe's bones being burnt in 1428, from John Foxe's Book of Martyrs.

Wycliffe was posthumously declared a heretic in 1415. The intensity of persecution of his followers gathered such a pace that in 1428, Wycliffe's bones were actually dug up from his grave, 44 years after his death and were burnt as those of a heretic. Other grisly ends, depicted in Foxe's Book of Martyrs (1563) befell many prominent Lollard followers. Notably, Sir John Oldcastle, on whom Shakespeare's Falstaff is based, was found guilty of both treason and heresy - he had to be hung, drawn and quartered and then burnt.

By the time of 1521, our quincentenary date, things were about to take the next leap forward. William Tyndale, inspired by new Renaissance ideas and the work of Erasmus amongst others, first embarked on a new translation of the bible. Access to Greek and Hebrew texts and expertise meant that he left England and worked in Antwerp on first a translation of the new Testament and then a complete bible. It is this translation which formed the basis of the 'Great Bible' put in every English church by Henry VIII in 1539 and was ultimately

crucial in the work on the authorised version or King James Bible of 1611.

After the talk there followed a lively set of questions and some discussion. When asked why he hadn't mentioned the advent of the printing press, David replied simply that he was talking about Wycliffe and his followers, that predates Gutenberg's invention of about 1460. By the same token, he added that neither had he mentioned the sack of Constantinople in 1453 that caused Greek scholars and books to flee to western Europe. Translation from Greek and printing, marked the passing of the essentially oral tradition of the Lollard era and gave way to the work of Tyndale.

David expressed to me how pleased he was with the warm reception for his talk and the large number of questions. The pride and respect that Amersham people still feel for 'their' martyrs 500 years on, was indeed on show by many of the reactions. We now all await eagerly the new production of the Martyrs' Play as soon as possible after the lifting of current Covid restrictions.

John Morgan

The Brewers of Amersham

Report by Mark Ladd



William Weller
1727 – 1802

Maltster and Founder of
Amersham Brewery 1771

The timing of Julian Hunt's talk on The Brewers of Amersham was very appropriate as it coincided with the news of the recent sale of the Maltings to a developer and the interest that has created. His talk traced his recent, and ongoing, considerable research into the development of the Maltings, the Amersham Brewery and the Weller pub estate from foundation to eventual sale in 1929.

The photograph above, courtesy of Malcolm Weller was taken by his uncle Eric Taylor, husband to Barbara Taylor who researched much of the genealogy for the Weller family tree.



Weller's the Fleur de Lys at Coleshill in the 1920's.

The origins of the Amersham brewers go back considerably earlier than the breweries of most other smaller towns. Its origins have been traced back at least to 1634 whereas most other town breweries were founded in the 18th century. The first record of a brewery is in the will of Gyles Watkins, an Amersham resident who died in 1636, which recorded his leaving a brew house drawing table.

A little later, surprisingly as it was a notable puritanical area, there was evidence of maltsters working in Amersham at the time and in 1665, Edward Parratt, a Quaker, was recorded as a maltster in the town in business supplying malt to the London brewers.

Further wills traced the names and families of those involved as maltsters and or brewers during the remainder of the 17th century. In 1700 a William Ball is recorded as the owner of a

brewhouse that was let to a tenant Richard Tipping who continued as a brewer until his death in 1743. Then a John Lawrence took over the lease and is recorded as living in Church Street, next to the brewery.

The emergence of Wellers as brewers of Amersham is traced to a William Weller who was born in 1727 in High Wycombe. He had become established as a maltster in one of the 4 maltings in that town before moving to Amersham in 1772. Here he took over the tenancy of the brewery and in 1775 is recorded as building a brewery storehouse in Church Street. He had also started buying tied houses including the Saracens Head, bought from John Lawrence, the Old Griffin in Mop End, the Fleur de Lys at Coleshill and the Red Lion and the Crown at Little Missenden. William Weller died in 1802 leaving the business to his sons.

Agnes Bell had been the freeholder of the brewery in 1735. The freehold passed down the female line of daughters until its sale to sons of William Weller in 1818. This sale included 10 acres of land, 10 of meadow and 10 of pasture, 35 acres in all.

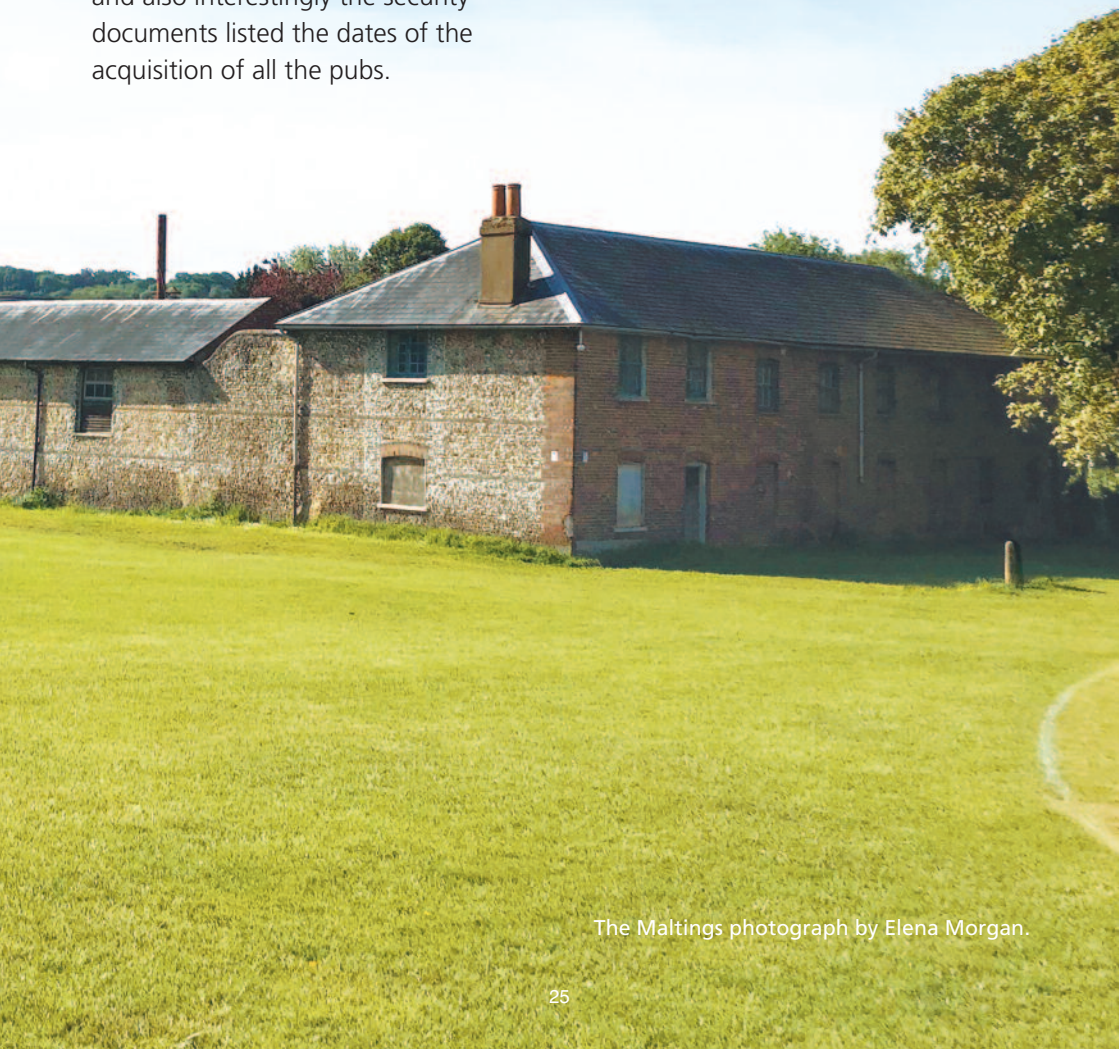
Further tied house purchases by the Weller family around this time in Amersham included the Chequers and the Queens Head in Whielden Street and in Chesham, the Red Lion and the Golden Ball. The two sons of William Weller continued to run the business and to acquire more and more pubs for the estate until their deaths in 1838 and 1843.



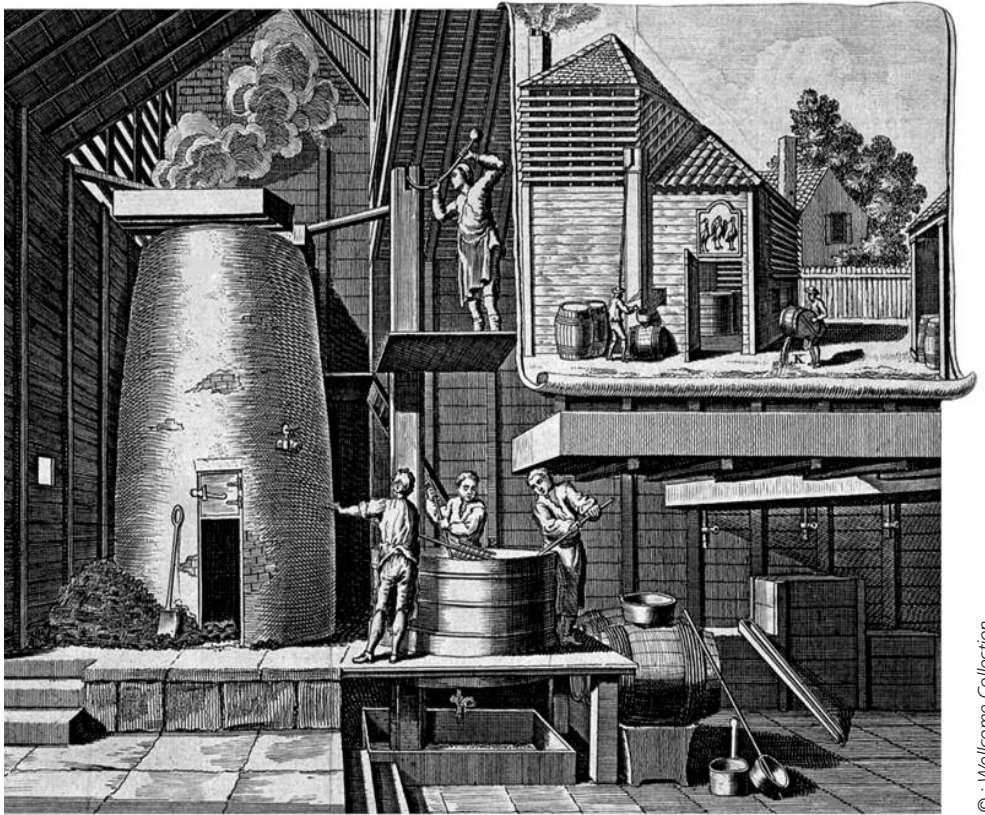
A major setback to the business occurred in 1837 with a fire at the Maltings resulting in a loss of stock amounting to £5,000 with the insured value limited to only £1,500. The Maltings as we know them today were in all probability rebuilt in around 1839.



The business continued to be run by family members, to grow, and to acquire even more estate in the surrounding area. All the estate was within the range of the brewery dray but even so was as far away as Uxbridge, Watlington, Quainton and Woburn. In order to continue to acquire properties, and to build railway hotels in Amersham and Beaconsfield, necessary funds were raised with the whole of the estate provided as security and also interestingly the security documents listed the dates of the acquisition of all the pubs.



The Maltings photograph by Elena Morgan.



The interior and exterior of a working brewhouse. Engraving, c.1747.

By 1892 the business employed 50 people in the brewery and so would have been major employers in the town being run by George Weller, the third generation of Wellers. He continued to expand the estate so that around 1909 it comprised 150 tied houses.

About this time he handed over the management to his son, Gerard Masterton Weller who eventually in 1929 sold the brewery and some 150 pubs to Benskins Brewers of Watford for £360,000, thereby ending the brewers of Amersham.

The lecture provided a fascinating historical record about the two major buildings in Amersham, the Maltings and the Brewery (which is now Badminton Court). There is undoubtedly more to be discovered as Covid has restricted Julian's access to further information on the brewers, their business and the historic buildings in the town. His enthusiasm to continue the research was obvious and we look forward to further updates and, possibly even, the production of a new publication by the Amersham Museum.

Subscriptions 2021

At the time of writing about 95% of our members have paid their subscription for 2021, mostly by direct debit (GoCardless) or (for longer-standing members) by standing order. Well done and thank you!

A few of those have paid more than required, usually because they have not changed their standing order when a partner has sadly died or because they forgot to cancel their standing order when they opted to pay by direct debit. Thank you for your generous donation to Society funds!

A few have paid too little, so far, usually because they did not alter their standing order when the subscription was increased 4 years ago.

For those who have not paid at all, remember that our Constitution says that forfeiture of membership is automatic if the subscription is unpaid by 30th June. Anyone with a guilty conscience, please make out your cheque (£11.50 for one member, £17 for two family members at the same address) to the **Amersham Society** and send it to me at Troye Cottage, 32 Whielden Street, Amersham, HP7 0HU, or contact me at peterborrows@cantab.net or **01494 728422** to arrange to sign up to pay by direct debit.

If you have not paid, or have paid too little, you should already have had an e-mail or letter from me but if you are not sure whether you are fully paid, please contact me as above.

Peter Borrows



The Twelve Days of Christmas poster by Xavier Romero-Frias, via Wikimedia Commons.

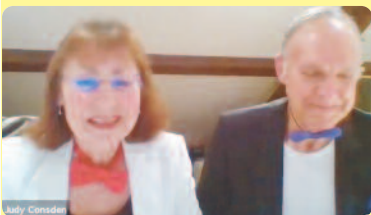
Twelfth Night Revels

The winter spike in daily Covid -19 cases was nearing its peak and the early days of the post-Christmas lockdown were upon us. Few in Amersham expecting to meet up with others in person until Easter at the earliest but to cheer us all up, Amersham Society members, **Judy** and **Mike Consden**, celebrated impresarios of the Amersham am-dram scene, valiantly allowed themselves to be volunteers to produce a ZoomFest of local talent performing party pieces in the Society's inaugural Twelfth Night Revels.

Mike Consden opened in the character of a vaudeville compere dying on stage with a self-penned series of comic apologies for acts which could not be included. There were the three members who had planned the whole of the Iliad in the original Greek, all of Beowulf in the original Anglo Saxon

was thought to be misleading. And there was the member who wanted to perform the whole of Wagner's Ring Cycle using a washing machine in place of the Orchestra, but he objected to it being renamed Wagner's Rinse Cycle.

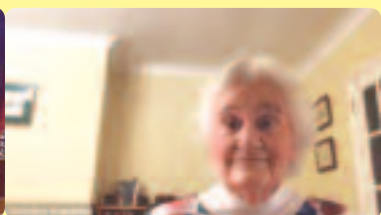
Laurette Read elevated the tone from the moment she appeared with



Judy and Mike Consden



Martin and Laurette Read



Christine Standing

and the unabridged Mahabharata in the original Sanskrit – when challenged that this might be a bit dull, the trio complained that 85% of Amersham Society members would find it compared favourably to the evening entertainments on Saga holidays. There was the lady ornithologist who was hoping to sell copies of her latest book based about the moods of water fowl, this one was to be about the ill-temper of the water rail but the talk had to be excluded because the title “Cross Rail”

the most immaculate (and presumably entirely natural) coiffure that defied the shaggy-locked norms of lockdown life. William Shakespeare's play was believed to have premiered 420 years ago to the day – on Twelfth Night 1601 and Laurette assumed the role of Duke of Orsino with the opening speech, *“If Music be the food of love, play on...”*.

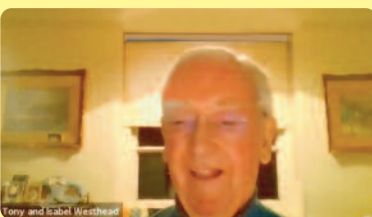
Christine Standing as Hilaire Belloc was up next, to relate the awful fate of *“The Boy whose name was Jim”*. The tale was told, right through, of

Jim's last trip, to the Zoo: he gave the slip to his nurse but found something rather worse.

Tony Westhead answered Orsino's call with the only musical number of the evening. He mastered the microphone in his computer to give a fine rendition of three verses from

nothing would fit, not even a blouse...". The parody of *"The Night Before Christmas"* listed all of the foods to be banished until such time as the ounces had vanished... until we were wished, one and all, *"Happy New Year and a Good Diet to all!"*

From Judy's celery sticks, **Stan Pretty**



Tony Westhead



Stan Pretty



Graham Cook

"Mountains of Mourne" by Percy French, an Irish humorous songwriter of whom we had been reminded in 2020 on the centenary of his death. The song takes the form of a letter from a naïve young Irishman who has come to London in search of his fortune and is writing to his girl back home in County Down about the wonders of the big city.

Judy Consden shared a New Year lament, *'Twas the month after Christmas and, all through the house,*

transported us to back to a sumptuous feast down under with, *"A Bush Christmas"*, a touching and vivid account by the early 20th century Australian poet C J Dennis. As Stan's dulcet Aussie twang faded with the sun on the gum trees we returned to the here and now with a bump - **Graham Cook** making his debut as a ventriloquist with a knitted doll called Jim. The two of them, unused as they were to literary festivals such as this, were calling on all to Clap for Carers on

Thursdays. Fortunately neither Graham nor Jim were wearing face masks or it should not have been possible to see how brilliantly Jim delivered his lines without moving his lips or how Graham managed to juggle an extremely silly set of false teeth between upper and lower lips whilst



Richard Worland

Jim was reciting his appreciative ode to the Amersham Society.

Richard Worland followed with verses of nonsense poems from 'Alice through the Looking Glass' by Lewis Carroll – Jabberwocky and the Aged, Aged Man. And very gladly did we drink the Worland health.

Mike Consden had planned to read an account by Sir Neville Cardus of a Yorkshire v Lancashire cricket match which was held in May 1939. It was a favourite story of Mike's father and

Mike shared memories of the stories his father used to tell some sixty years ago. But in looking for the Cardus text, he found that the story was much embellished by father and so it was that Mike retold the tale in the style of his father.

To end the evening, we returned to Shakespeare's text for the closing words from Twelfth Night. **Martin Read**, sporting a rather undersized bowler hat, assumed the role of Feste, the clown. And with a hey ho...our play was done.

Dorothy Symes led the thanks to Mike and Judy for organising the event and applause for all the performances, proclaiming that Amersham does have Talent. Annie Hamilton Pike added a bonus monologue, Lena Morgan had to abandon plans to put us into chat rooms in case Graham and Jim were allocated different rooms, and the last word went to Christine Standing, declaring she had laughed more tonight than she had for ages.

Edward Copisarow

Amersham Museum News



At the end of a warm and sunny Spring day, it is with hope and optimism that I write this piece for the newsletter. We have all spent so much time apart the last few months, mostly at home, that it feels a really positive release to be spending more time outside, with our friends and family. At the museum, it's been great to welcome volunteers back, to help catch up with work on the collection that cannot take place at home, and to prepare the museum for re-opening in May.

On Sunday 4th April we were able to re-launch our guided walks programme, with our popular Amersham old town walk. Numbers are limited to five people with a guide and tickets are pre-booked on our website. On Saturday 25th April our monthly Tudor walks also restarted. With the support of the Rothschild Foundation a team of volunteers are now developing a series of new, themed walks. The walks, which will be launched in June and July, are a mixture of guided and self-led. Themes for the guided walks include Modernist architecture, the inns of Amersham and a new version of the old town walk. The self-guided walks will be printed, with illustrated maps, and the routes include a 'Station to Station' walk from Little Chalfont to Amersham stations, a walk following old drovers roads and a walk in the Chess Valley. The walks will be available to download on the museum's website or in printed form, to be collected from the museum. We have also worked with artist Livi Gosling to create a new self-guided trail for families around Amersham old town. This beautifully illustrated trail has also been supported by the Rothschild Foundation, the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Chilterns AONB, *Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty*.

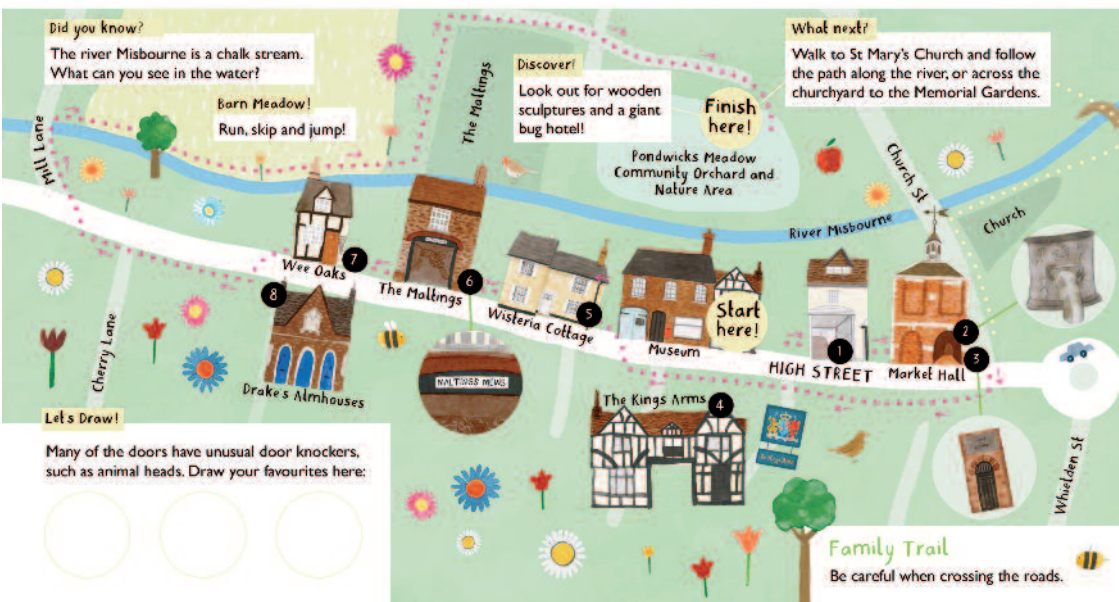
Time Travel Trail!

Explore the details of Amersham's historic High Street and the river Misbourne. Discover details about how people lived here in the past!



Did you know?
Part of the museum is over 500 years old, the oldest home in Amersham!

LOCAL STORIES AT THE AMERSHAM MUSEUM



With the support of the Rothschild Foundation, the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Chilterns AONB. Artwork by Livi Gosling.

In the museum, the Rothschild Foundation has also supported improvements to our interpretation, to compensate for the many interactives that we have had to remove because of Covid restrictions. Changes include: a new self-guided trail for families of the museum and garden; new set dressing and graphics in our Tudor room; the introduction of music on a record player in our 1960s space; and increased access to our photograph

collection. We're also making changes to our reminiscence boxes for older people, so that they're easier to be used by staff in care homes, whilst it's not possible for us to make visits. We're making similar adjustments to our loan boxes for schools. All of the changes that we have made will improve and enhance the visitor experience and will remain once Covid restrictions ease.



The Museum herb garden.



We will be running a series of arts activities inspired by our garden this summer.

Alongside our preparations for re-opening, we've been busy online. There are many active research projects, being undertaken by volunteers at home. These include: research into life in Tudor Amersham; 20th century architecture; research into notable local figures; and connections between local people and the transatlantic slave trade. We've also delivered much of what was our offline programme online, throughout the winter. This includes our children's art club, an art history course for

adults focusing on Expressionist artist, Marie-Louise von Motesiczky, and a series of talks. In February we launched 'Local Stories' online, a 45-minute programme, exploring the history of local people and places. Each session has been free, and people can just join on the day, or watch a recording on You Tube. The attendance has been great, with a really mixed attendance of local people and people living around the world with a local connection. Topics have included: lesser known global

connections of Amersham's brewing family, the Wellers; Amersham Playhouse Theatre and the Regent Cinema; the census; 20th century architecture; and émigré artists. You can catch up on the episodes here: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZaKsr958Xp-_ztNI-GO0Rw/videos

Local Stories is now running monthly with future episodes detailed here: <https://amershammuseum.org/events/>

Under the current government guidelines we can re-open the museum from 17th May. On that basis we will begin with a three-day opening, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays from Thursday 20th May, 12 noon to 4.30pm. Pre-booking via our website is recommended but it will be possible to turn up and visit, as long as there aren't pre-existing bookings. We're also planning a series of summer events in our wonderful herb garden. This includes art workshops, for children in May half-term and art workshops and short talks for adults in early July. We're also planning a special event in the garden, to tie in with the inaugural Buckinghamshire Culture Open Weekend on the weekend of 24th and 25th July. Further details can be found on our website.

As I mentioned in my last report, 2021 is a special year for the museum; 30 years ago we opened to visitors at 49 High Street for the first time. So

much has been achieved over the last 30 years and so many members of the Amersham Society made an important contribution to help make the museum a success. The Amersham Society established the museum's first collection and members helped secure 49 High Street as a museum.

Throughout the 1980s they helped to restore our special medieval building and fundraise to ensure that it could open with beautifully presented displays in 1991. In the autumn newsletter we will provide a more detailed account of how the museum was first established. To celebrate this special birthday we are recording people's memories of setting up the museum. Do you have something to share? We would love to hear it. We're also working with established groups in the museum, including our reminiscence groups and art club, to create a new permanent piece of art for the museum. Depending on Covid restrictions we're also hoping we can have a celebration together later in the year.

I hope that you're able to venture out and enjoy our local area and that you're able to come and visit us at the museum sometime soon. I wish you all the best for an enjoyable summer, spending time safely with family and friends.

Emily Toettcher



Rt. Hon. Dame Cheryl Gillan
1952 – 2021

We were very sad to learn of the death on 4th April of Dame Cheryl Gillan, Member of Parliament for Chesham and Amersham since 1992. Dame Cheryl was hard working, supportive and always approachable. She was well known for her work in the community and in particular for her opposition to the construction of the High Speed Railway (HS2) through the Chilterns.

Our sympathy goes to her family and friends.

NOTICEBOARD

Programme of Talks

The talks will continue for the present to be held by Zoom. We shall remind members of the dates and time by e-alert.

The meetings will open at 7.45pm and the talks start promptly at 8.00pm. We shall also give members plenty of notice when we are able to meet again in person.

- 26 May **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.
- 8 or 22 September **Society Outing**
We hope to arrange an outing to **Winchester** and the **Gurkha Museum** during this month but much will depend on Covid and also on members being willing to travel by coach.
- 29 September **Bulstrode**
Magnificence and Scandal on our doorstep. A talk by Denise Beddows.
- 27 October **Annual General Meeting**
Followed by a talk on the work of Scannappeal.
- 24 November **Changing Wildlife in the Chilterns**
We travel with Naturalist John Tyler from warm seas, through ice ages, tundra and forest to the farmlands and beech woods of today.

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