

A photograph of several pink clematis flowers with dark purple centers, growing on a vine against a blue wooden wall. The flowers are in various stages of bloom, and green leaves are visible. A brick wall is partially visible at the top left.

**MAY 2022**

**AMERSHAM SOCIETY  
NEWSLETTER**





Elly Bazigos design for the Amersham Museum tea towel. See page 34

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Cover photograph of Clematis by Elena Morgan.

# Report from the Chair

Two years ago in May 2020 my report referred to the introduction of measures in Britain to keep people safe and limit the spread of the corona virus. There was the first lockdown, social distancing and the start of a vaccination programme. None of us had any idea then for how long the pandemic would affect our lives.

## Zoom

The Amersham Society committee agreed at the time that it was important to keep in touch with Amersham Society members as far as possible. We decided that our programme of talks should continue but that from April 2020 the talks would be on Zoom. This transition took place remarkably smoothly as both our members and speakers embraced what was for many new technology and we were greatly helped by our Web Manager's expertise at hosting an efficient Zoom meeting. Even the most experienced speakers were really pleased to have a pre-talk meeting before the day of the talk to ensure that everything flowed smoothly on the night and that their technology was working correctly, or if not to know that Lena would sort it out. And we have been pleased that our membership numbers have stayed steady during the past three years.

This year we have been able to hold the March, April and May talks in the Kings Chapel, so that we can once again meet up in person with fellow members and their guests. Members have welcomed this step towards normal life and we have been very happy that the Kings Arms continues to make the Chapel available to us on a Wednesday evening. Now that we are able to work with Zoom, it is clear that it will still have a role in our lives. The committee for example continues to meet on Zoom and we have recently met with some volunteer helpers on Zoom.

## Future Activities

Although thanks to Zoom we were able to plan the programme of talks for this year, the uncertainties caused by the virus have inhibited us from making firm plans for other activities too far in advance. The outing is still being considered and on present plans it will take place in September. Details will be sent to members by e-alert once the details have been confirmed.

## Have Your Say

On a recent Have Your Say poll we invited members to let us know if and how they might be able to help with our main activities, in particular looking at individual planning applications and also commenting on the Local Plan when it issues, arranging Society events such as the programme of talks and the outing, also editing the Newsletter.

Everyone is very busy at present particularly as covid related restrictions are lifted, most everyday activities resume and people feel more able to plan holidays. It was therefore reassuring from the response to this Have Your Say poll that members who responded realise that a volunteer Society cannot survive without volunteers and that it makes sense to share the work of running the Society.

Teamwork has been particularly important during the past few years and the committee has worked hard together to keep the Society flourishing during these troubled times. We have had the benefit of some fantastic skills among the team and have kept the Society activities as straightforward as possible. Our Web provides clear details of local events organised by the Society and also those organised by other groups. We look at local planning applications and sometimes submit objections to them. Our understanding is that each letter or e-mail to the Council about a planning application carries the same weight, whether it is signed by one person or a group, in our case a Society. So if a particular issue concerns you let the Society know about it, but also contact the Council as well.



## Emily

Finally I would also like to include in this Newsletter a message to wish Emily Toettcher well in her new pastures. The creation of a museum in Amersham was one of the founding purposes of the Amersham Society but it was not until 30 years ago that the collection was finally able to move into premises of its own. Emily was appointed Curator ten years ago and has been a most wonderful driver and enabler in getting the museum to touch the lives of thousands of members of the community every year. Her partnerships with successive chairmen, Anthony del Tufo and Gary Gotch advanced the historical work and the community engagement hugely and the work to expand the museum into the adjacent

Lemon Tree premises made possible the numerous school visits, reminiscence groups and so much more. Emily's ability to make every volunteer feel included and valued has been a tremendous force for good – there are very few small towns to which you can move and get to know people without being a school gate parent or a churchgoer but Amersham Museum has given us a third string to our bow. With new heads of collections and of volunteers in place, Emily will be leaving us in safe hands when she finishes at the end of July but before she goes, I would like to add to her many accolades the thanks of the Amersham Society.

**Dorothy Symes**



# The Market Hall – Update

The repair work to the clock tower of the Market Hall is now complete. The work has been complex and time consuming and included applications for listed building consent. As expected various structural problems and snags were encountered along the way. An archaeological survey has been carried out.

A brief summary follows of some of the main repair work carried out. The bell frame was in poor condition and moved readily when pushed. A new bell frame was built off site to match exactly the existing frame, with new oak being incorporated where needed. The heavy gauge lead roof had become brittle and crystallised with age and the split and cracked panels were replaced where necessary. The glass on the clock faces was broken and cracked and was removed and replaced or repaired. The cast clock faces were corroded and were removed, repainted and where necessary re-glazed using heritage glass. The wiring of the clock was replaced. It was also necessary for the contractors to employ a hawker, to fly a hawk twice weekly from the tower to deter pigeons. Bird proof netting is now in place around the turret and over the roof gully.

The next stage of the current project is to carry out redecoration of the external paintwork and repairs to the external brickwork. This work will be carried out using a cherry picker van instead of scaffolding. Traffic controls will be needed for work to the southern (High Street) side of the Hall and there may be some delay in obtaining approval for this.

Amersham Town Council has also appointed a local architect who will carry out a feasibility study on improving access to the Hall.

Information provided by **Elizabeth Richardson**, Town Clerk.

# BOUDICCA

Dr Eyers began by explaining that the old name of Boadicea was a misspelling and the correct version was spelt Boudicca.

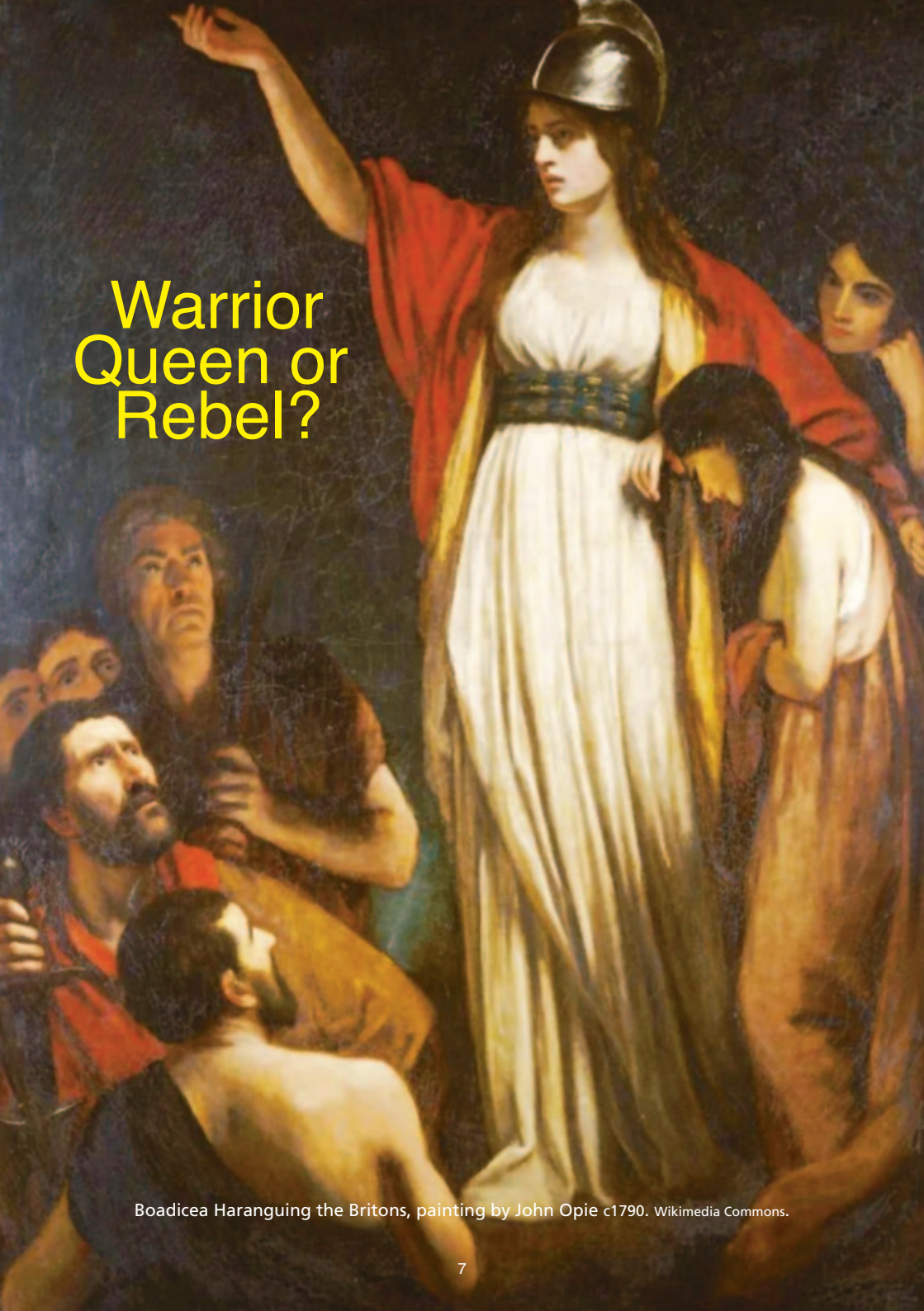
She emphasised that there was much we did not know about this iconic figure, although she herself nobly refrained from using this rather overused adjective. Nevertheless, before long it was very apparent from her excellent talk that Boudicca was indeed seen as an iconic figure.

Apparently, even the Suffragettes demonstrated under her statue on the Embankment in London.

Dr Eyers thought that there was still some doubt about her name. The word Bouda or Bua meant Victory in Gaelic and it might just have been what all her army screamed and shouted as a battle cry to intimidate the enemy.



# Warrior Queen or Rebel?



Boadicea Haranguing the Britons, painting by John Opie c1790. [Wikimedia Commons](#).



Modern statue of Tacitus outside the Austrian Parliament Building in Vienna.  
Wikimedia Commons.

The history of this period was all written by Roman historians principally Tacitus writing it from the winners point of view. There are no histories of Boudicca from the losing side. Jill thought Tacitus was reasonably reliable and he did have a relation Agricola who had served in Britain. The Romans portrayed Boudicca as a woman *"huge of frame with a fierce aspect and a harsh voice"* and with extremely long red hair hanging down to the waist. Red hair was apparently associated with barbarians and prostitutes so it was not a good look to Roman eyes. She wore a heavy gold chain round her neck over a colourful tunic and a heavy topcoat secured by a brooch. The Romans also had a very

biased misogynistic view of women generally. Women were supposed, in their view, to be gentle and demure, always obedient to their husbands, well read, but quite unable to participate in politics or handle finances. So the image presented by Boudicca was extremely shocking and unfavourable by Roman standards.

Lots of portraits or images of Boudicca have been produced over the years including one of her wearing a helmet by John Opie in about 1790. There was even a portrait of a *"sexy Boudicca"* which seemed somewhat improbable. It showed her sitting on a saddled horse at a period when saddles did not exist. Incidentally, even Tacitus sometimes made mistakes saying the Brits carried hexagonal shields when in fact their shields were circular round shields. The hexagonal shields were used in Gaul so there was some mix up there.

Jill was at pains to stress that the Brits were not barbarians at all. They washed daily using soap. They had lots of quite refined ceramics and jewelry including beautiful gold torcs. They also possessed civitas and an organised system of fields and landholdings. She showed a picture of a typical Iron Age house, not as sophisticated as the Roman villas, but a quite presentable mud and thatch dwelling. There were also several coinages operating in Iron Age Britain amongst the different tribes.

So why the revolt?



Iron Age silver coin attributed to Prasutagus of the Iceni, c50-60 AD.  
© Norwich Castle Museum.



Torcs from the Snettisham treasure on display in the Boudicca Gallery at Norwich Castle.

© Norwich Castle Museum.

It seems that the Romans and local Brits in the Iceni tribe based in Norfolk had been getting along reasonably well until Boudicca's husband the Chieftain of the Iceni, Prasutagus, died. It was AD 60 /61.

In his will he left his kingdom divided up between half to his two daughters and half to Nero. The fact that he did not leave it to Boudicca seems odd especially given that she was such a strong and forceful character. Also the fact that his will left half his estate to the Roman Emperor Nero does not suggest any ill will towards the Romans as an occupying power but it may have been intended as some form of bribery or protection.

However, after his death, everything changed. The Romans demanded and took everything. Boudicca presumably put up a strong protest. To assert their superiority and humiliate her, the Romans flogged her and raped her two daughters. Jill suggested that was so they could then kill them as apparently it was not the done thing for a Roman soldier to kill a virgin. Maybe it offended their Gods.

Boudicca raised a revolt to exact revenge for this foul and brutal treatment. She stirred up neighbouring tribes the Trinovantes who had also suffered similar plunder and brutal treatment from the Roman army. This seems to have demonstrated considerable leadership qualities on her part as usually the different tribes squabbled. Jill thought her high rank played an important part in winning over support.

At this time, the major part of the Roman army under General Gaius Paulinus was hundreds of miles away in Anglesey in the North West searching out Druids whom the Romans hated and regarded as the main source of anti-Roman activity.



Representation of Boudicca based on the description of Roman historian Dio Cassius, painting by Ivan Lapper.

© Norwich Castle Museum.

Boudicca's forces probably numbered over 100,000 with some estimating 250,000 and she wiped out the Ninth Legion by surrounding and slaughtering them. Then she marched on Colchester, known as Camulodunum, which was very much a Roman settlement popular with retired soldiers. Colchester was razed to the ground with Roman statues, monuments and all buildings used for worshipping their Roman Gods destroyed.

Then she moved on Londinium and set it on fire. Jill thought Boudicca might possibly have warned the local inhabitants of London to leave as there is little evidence of human remains.

Then Boudicca moved onto Verulamium now St Albans and destroyed that town.

After Boudicca had destroyed these three cities one after the other, it is unclear what she did next.

Jill thought her forces might have started to make their way home to Norfolk with a satisfied job done sort of attitude.

However, after eventually hearing news of her revolt Gaius Paulinus was returning with the main part of his Roman army. He had decided not to attempt to defend Londinium as an impracticable and indefensible proposition. Instead, the Romans met up with Boudicca somewhere along what is now the A5. Mancetter? The precise location is unknown. However, Gaius Paulinus was an experienced general and he very cleverly chose the field of battle which was a narrow defile with woods on both sides and an open plain in front.

This meant his flanks were protected and he could not be attacked from the sides or from behind.

He divided his force of about 10,000 men into three divisions with men in depth. They would have been too stretched out otherwise in a long thin line.

They were probably outnumbered 10 to 1. Paulinus made a powerful speech to his troops emphasising that although they appeared to be greatly outnumbered, they were only confronted by a dreadful woman.

Boudicca also made an eloquent speech going round her troops in her chariot.

According to Tacitus she told her army - "*We British are used to women commanders in war; I am descended from mighty men! But I am not fighting for my kingdom and wealth now. I am*



*fighting as an ordinary person for my lost freedom, my bruised body and my outraged daughters".*

When the Brits later charged down the plain in an unruly mass, the highly disciplined Roman troops stood firm and hurled their javelins. Some of the Brits recoiled and turned back from this initial shock and their huge numbers became a disadvantage causing chaos. The Romans kept edging slowly forward in a wedge formation with locked shields and short swords. If one Roman soldier was killed in the front row his place was immediately filled by another man from the rear. The bloc moved on staying in a wedge shape. Ultimately, virtually all the Brits were defeated with their women and children also on the field of battle together with their chariots and general impedimenta.

It is estimated about 400 Roman soldiers died and about 80,000 Brits died in what turned out to be a quite short battle sometimes called the battle of Watling Street.

The ultimate fate of Boudicca is another unknown.

It is estimated that altogether she may have been responsible for the death of up to as many as 70,000 Romans.

But it is thought she may have poisoned herself rather than allow herself to be captured and taken to Rome to be degraded with further humiliation in the traditional Roman Triumph.


Instead, Boudicca became a legend.

## **Tony Westhead**



Statue of Boudicca on her chariot close to the Houses of Parliament in London.

Photo by Mark Cartwright.



Amersham vent shaft looking north.  
November 2021.

# HS2

## Update on the Latest Developments

Peter McLoughlin reports on a talk by Keith Hoffmeister of the Chiltern Society

For its first meeting of 2022 The Amersham Society welcomed back Keith Hoffmeister of the Chiltern Society for an update of the HS2 project.

Accompanied by a stunning collection of photographs many taken from the air Keith outlined the current status of the project and traced the line of construction from the Colne Valley Regional Park through the Chilterns to Wendover and beyond.

Like so many major Civil engineering works the timetable [and associated cost] has changed a great deal since the project was approved.

Phase 1 of the project from London to Birmingham was due to be completed by 2026. It will now be completed between 2028 and 2031. Phase 2a from Birmingham to Crewe is planned to be completed between 2035 and 2040. The eastern leg from Birmingham to Leeds has now been cancelled.

South tunnel portal looking north west.

November 2021.



The initial estimate for Phase1 was £37.5 billion but the latest estimate, before cancellation of the eastern leg is now £98 billion.

Because the new station at Euston with 10 platforms will not be completed before 2031 trains will start and terminate at a new super hub at Old Oak Common. This interchange hub will have platforms for HS2 plus Crossrail, the Heathrow Express and GWR trains. The planned service of 18 trains per hour in each direction with each train carrying up to 550 passengers is likely to be reduced to 17 trains.

Leaving Old Oak Common, the route continues in a tunnel to West Ruislip and then heads towards the Chiltern Tunnel South Portal near the M25 crossing the Colne Valley Park and

the numerous lakes on a viaduct. This will be over two miles long, the longest in Britain, and trains will cross it at over 200 miles per hour some ten metres above the valley. It will only take 90 seconds for the trains to travel from West Ruislip to the tunnel entrance.

The twin Tunnel Boring Machines [TBMs] are already inside the 10.6-mile-long tunnel and making their way towards Amersham. The TBMs will reach the vent shaft in Whielden Lane in January or February of 2023. The Amersham vent shaft is one of four along the tunnel route. The other shafts are at Chalfont St Peter, Chalfont St Giles and Little Missenden. There will also be an intervention shaft at South Heath just before the North Portal exit from the Tunnel. Unlike the other three





vent shaft head houses which will resemble farm buildings the Amersham site will have an aluminium crown. In spite of objections HS2 Ltd seem unwilling to change the design having spent a considerable amount of money on their preferred solution!

Leaving Amersham, the tunnel will pass between Shardeloes house and Shardeloes Lake before passing under the River Misbourne for a second time on the way to the Little Missenden Vent Shaft which it will reach between July and August of 2023.

The contractors have been warned about the risk of losing the River Misbourne [and Shardeloes Lake] because of the fractured nature of the chalk aquifer but are confident that there will not be a problem. Chiltern Society

experts have expressed their deep misgivings. If the chalk does indeed fracture the river and lake will go.

Construction of the Little Missenden vent shaft has led to the installation of traffic lights to allow traffic entering the site to cross the dual carriageway rather than continuing to the Frith Hill roundabout at Great Missenden, saving five miles each visit.

When the vent shaft head house, designed to look like a farm building as at Chalfont St Peter, is completed in April 2025 the traffic lights will be removed.

HS2 Ltd also plans to plant 1700 trees here with a mixture of species.

The last shaft to be dug in the Chilterns will be an intervention shaft simply to gain access to the track in case



of emergency. This will be near the former Annie Bailey's restaurant in South Heath close to the North Portal. The TBMs will reach the North Portal in Autumn 2023. At this point they will be decommissioned and scrapped.

From the North Portal the trains will enter the South Heath cutting some 16 metres deep heading towards Leather Lane, Bowood Lane, and Rocky Lane crossing over a viaduct at Wendover Dean.

The route from the North Portal to Wendover will lead to the temporary closure and re-routing of a number of footpaths. The footpaths will all be either re-instated or rerouted once construction has been completed. Some of the diverted footpaths have been signposted by the Chiltern Society.

Sadly, the construction work so far has led to the demolition of Mulberry Park House the loss of a large section of Grims Ditch and part of the Ancient Woodland of Jones' Hill Wood.

Approaching Wendover, the route will cross the A413, the Chiltern Railway Line and Small Dean Lane on another viaduct. We can expect frequent traffic delays on the A413 during construction!

From the viaduct the line will run on an embankment before entering the so-called Wendover Green Tunnel some  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile long. This will be a cut and cover tunnel made using precast concrete box sections set in an excavated trench which will then be landscaped.

Wendover Cricket Club founded in 1865 is on the route and will eventually

move to a new facility at Halton but negotiations with HS2 Ltd have been difficult.

From the Wendover Green Tunnel the line will skirt Stoke Mandeville, Aylesbury and Waddesdon before heading North passing the Quainton Railway Centre.

The first of 54 trains being built by a consortium of Hitachi and Alstom at a cost of £2 billion will roll off the production line in 2027.

The trains will have a top speed of 225 mph and will be used on other parts of the existing network. The operator will be Italy's national train company Trenitalia who are already responsible for other parts of the UK's Rail network.

In order to provide the pre cast concrete items required for the construction of the viaduct over the Colne Valley and the lining for the tunnel a dedicated factory has been built close to the tunnel South Portal close to the M25. The entire project is estimated to require 20 million tonnes of concrete equivalent to the UK's annual production.

In addition to a manufacturing facility the South Portal site will also provide storage and a slurry treatment plant. Some 3 million cubic metres of spoil will be produced as water is pumped up to the cutting face through the TBMs and mixed with the chalk and flint before being pumped back as slurry to the treatment plant.

**Peter McLoughlin**

# The First Ghosts and Their Legacies

A Fascinating Share  
by Dr. Irving Finkel



*"This is of course, hardly disputably, the earliest picture of a ghost in the history of the world."* Dr. Irving Finkel.

4th century BC clay tablet, Southern Mesopotamia, via The British Museum, London.

Thanks to Dr. Irving Finkel, Senior Curator at the British Museum, and some ancient Mesopotamian scribes in the *"ghost business,"* we are offered a glimpse into the fascinating world of historical ghost encounters and the earliest known picture of a ghost.

Pressed into high quality clay with the best reed-tip the land between the Tigris and Euphrates had to offer, we see two figures on an old clay tablet. On the left, a ghost-man whose hands are bound together in front of him by a rope. To the right, a figure of an elegant woman dressed in an ankle-length garment, skullcap, and necklace. She's holding the other end of the rope and leading him back to the underworld where he belongs.

*"We were very pleased to welcome to our February Zoom talk a viewer from Springville Alabama, Pepper Cox. Pepper participated in the question session after Dr Finkel's fascinating talk and to our great delight also offered to write this report for our Newsletter"*

## About the Tablet

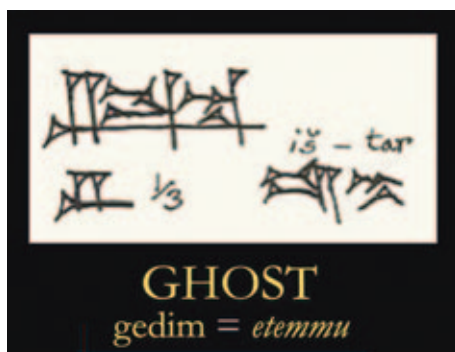
This incredible Ancient Babylonian tablet was discovered in 1883 by a local in what we now call Southern Iraq. It has two scars on the front (likely from a digging tool) and suffers damage and fading due to its exposure to moisture over time. Is the tablet a rare find? Yes and no.

The admission of Ancient Mesopotamia's ghost culture on this tablet is not rare. Of the British Museum's 130,000 plus collection of Sumerian and Babylonian cuneiform tablets (spanning 3,000 years of time) a large number mention daily interactions with ghosts quite casually. Almost, as Dr. Finkel says, *"taking them for granted."*

What is rare about the tablet is the Ghost itself. That an image of *"him"* was drawn, and the reason why is equally fascinating. Whoever hired the ancient Ghostbuster (most likely the ghost's family), the background information they provided about the ghost led the spellcaster to conclude that what the anxious, lonely ghost needed to be happy, and stay in the Underworld, was a love of his own. So, an incantation was written and a *"Ghost-Eve"* formed (no ribs harmed), with the intention of her leading him to eternal bliss and *"living happily ever after."*

## The Anatomy of A Ghost

Being a later civilization, the Babylonians didn't have a word for ghost so they borrowed the Sumerians. Much like English borrowing words from French and vice versa. The Sumerian word for ghost is *gedim*, which became *etemmu* in Babylonian and is very telling because the cuneiform word for *"ghost"* is fashioned by other symbols.



Sumerian word for Ghost.  
Wittily described by Dr. Finkel as being  
*"Completely un-intimidating and very friendly."*

As seen above there are (2) vertical signs on the right that make up the word *"ghost"* and (1) horizontal sign on the left. The horizontal symbol represents the fraction  $\frac{1}{3}$  and the other symbols *"ish"* and *"tar"* form the noun *"ishtar"* which means female goddess. *"It's very interesting"* expresses Dr Finkel *"that the oldest sign in the world we know of for a ghost is labeled as 1/3 divine femininity."*

And when you consider ancient burial ground discoveries (i.e., graves with cups, furniture, jewelry, and other material things), it truly reflects how Ancient Mesopotamians believed when a person dies, though the body decays, the spirit survives and goes somewhere. That the divine part of the person does not cease to exist.

### **Burying the Dead in Mesopotamia**

Ghost culture was not only common in ancient Mesopotamia, but expected. In the average household loved ones were buried within, or close to, the courtyard, with children and infants sometimes being buried in the home's walls instead. This way the family could "care" for the spirit and keep them at rest in the underworld. In Babylonia, it was the eldest son's responsibility to provide regular food and drink offerings so the spirit would not hold a grievance about neglect. And while 99% of the dead stayed where they were supposed to, some didn't...  
*You are the offspring of the wind  
I have laid you in the grave  
I have sent you down  
Why did you not fear my solemn oath?*

This spell expresses the quirky relationship between the living and familiar ghosts. The ghost is not abiding by the burial ritual and as Dr. Finkel humorously explains, the living

person is a bit frustrated and in a sense saying, "Hey, I did all the right things. Why are you back!?"

### **Sending Ghosts to the Underworld**

Ancient Mesopotamians knew certain types of ghosts were more likely to be a pain in the butt. Like those who died by falling into a well, in a fire, or during childbirth. In those days, it wouldn't be out of the ordinary to be chopping up vegetables for dinner and look up startled to see your dead uncle standing with you in the kitchen. If that happened, it was off to the market you went to have the local exorcist, magic practitioner, ghostbuster or whatever, to engrave a spell for you or perhaps whip up a quick amulet with the "Spell of Marduk" on it.



Two separate cuneiform amulets containing the "Spell of Marduk." The inscription:  
*"A Spell of Marduk. Ghost, stop appearing to me! Do not keep on appearing to me!"*



For more troublesome or serious offences, higher quality incantations and rituals were available to help cease recurring ghost visits once and for all.

*Dead person, why do you keep appearing to me, you whose cities are ruin heaps, and mere bones? I will not go to Kutha, the ghost's assembly point! You are conjured away by Queen Abattu, Queen Ereshkigal [Inanna's sister] and Ningeshtinanna, scribe of the gods, whose stylus is of lapis and carnelian!*

Followed by the ritual: *Open a pit towards the setting sun with bronze spade and cast ditch water and roasted shigushu grain flour into an ox horn. You recite incantation. You cast that liquid into the well [to go to the underworld]. You pass the censer and torch by the afflicted person. Then voila! The ghost is gone but what if you wanted to call a ghost out of the Netherworld?*

### **Necromancy**

Necromancy is the practice of conjuring and communicating with dead spirits. For this you need a room, some burning coals, heavy incense, an exorcist, and what else? Oh yes, the skull of the deceased person. Once the Sun God was properly addressed and asked to retrieve the spirit, the ghost rose to the land of the living and began speaking through the skull provided.

This wasn't half-heartedly or frivolous. As we've seen, it can be difficult to get the dead to stay in the underworld. So, while the process of conjuring them was somewhat quick, the remainder of the spell is focused on sending them back and the instructions are very clear, direct, and straightforward to ensure the conjured ghost returns to the underworld and stays there. Necromancy was a very real activity for the time period.

Even the infamous Saul of the Bible (who later changed his name to Paul) made a very intentional visit to seek the service of the Witch of Endor, or as she was better known in Mesopotamia, the Ghost Mistress. And this was after he banned the profession.

1 Samuel 28:8-9: *"So Saul disguised himself and put on other clothing and left, accompanied by two of his men. They came to the woman at night and said, "Use your ritual pit to conjure up for me the one I tell you..."* The woman replied, *"Who is it that I should bring up for you?"* He said, *"Bring up for me Samuel."*

Whether this biblical narrative is believed to be true or pure allegory, it accurately reflects the ghost culture of the time and is absolutely remarkable to have survived in the Bible today.



Clay relief believed to be Inanna, 19th–18th century BC, Southern Mesopotamia, via The British Museum, London.

## The Underworld

As we come to a close it seems fitting to descend, even briefly, into “life” in the Mesopotamian Netherworld through Babylonia’s tale *“The Descent of Ishtar.”* Ishtar is the Babylonian version of Sumer’s goddess Inanna, and she’s upset that her lover, the shepherd God Demuzi, is in the Netherworld. So, she ventures down to speak with her sister Ereshkigal, queen of the Underworld, and as she descends into the depths of the underworld, we learn how dark and dank the home of ghosts is. There is no light and only clay to eat and dust to drink.

And so we end in the dusty Netherworld, at the home of the (hopefully now happy) ghost and his companion mentioned at the start but it doesn’t mean we have to stay. The ghost-man and his companion have been chosen to exist among the living via a clay tablet in the British Museum and the Guinness Book of World Records.



Dr. Irving Finkel with his certificate.

On February 22, 2022, a very happy Dr. Irving Finkel received his certificate confirming the “*earliest picture of a ghost*” is making it into the next world record book and we can learn even more about Mesopotamian ghost culture and the Netherworld through his book: **The First Ghosts**. We are extremely grateful for him giving the whole of his life (since he was 12!) to learning and translating these ancient Sumerian legacies into a language we understand. “*But you can too,*” Dr. Finkel says, “*with just as little practice as say 10 – 20 years.*”

**Pepper Cox**

*Change doesn't always sit comfortably in an old market town so when Heinz Richardson built his house in Mill Lane it was a challenging departure from the norm. Six years after its completion, it has become part of the fabric of the area, has it made its mark in more ways than anticipated?* **Rebecca Tate**

# House19

a carbon neutral, exemplar energy efficient home rooted in an ancient historic town



As a principal of a London architecture partnership, Heinz could have built his exemplar award-winning sustainable house anywhere. Of course luck comes into finding the right plot, but there is sometimes serendipity in luck and he chose to build it here in Amersham, where he grew up as a teenager. There have been lots of articles written online about the house and its qualities, so when Heinz kindly invited Edward Copisarow and Rebecca Tate from the Amersham Society to take a look around, we were very curious to “look over the fence” at how his home embraces its Amersham setting, and similarly how Amersham might respond to its innovations, particularly as sustainability in our homes starts to become central to their day-to-day affordability.



There is a vogue for acquiring “dated” bungalows and turning them into “modern” houses, but how fundamentally “adapted” for 21st century living does that process usually make them? The essentials of many “modernisation” projects feature sleeker kitchens, shinier bathrooms, fresher paint, turbo-charged electrics, glossy windows and compliant insulation, and invariably as much floor-space as is affordable and permissible. But should our home improvements focus as much on operation as aesthetics? And do we design our homes just for ourselves or for the placemaking and visions they create in our towns? The UK has some of the oldest housing stock in Europe, a statistic that is increasingly being felt in the running costs of a home. Old housing may have quintessential period charm, but can also often be thermally inefficient, simultaneously draughty and poorly ventilated, difficult to keep damp and cold at bay or comfortably warm when the mercury drops. We are becoming conscious with each daily news headline just how much traditional character and conventional methods of powering our homes can cost us. With all the recent news having brought the cost of energy from a prick to our eco-conscience to the forefront of our minds, can a modern house in an old town have any learnings for how we could or should change our homes and our towns over the next decades?

Nestled in the north-west corner of Old Amersham is no. 19 Mill Lane, a corner plot at the top of the rise from the High Street, where the road meets School Lane. In its previous incarnation it was much the same as many plots laid out here and across the country in the 50s and 60s - a mid-century chalet bungalow: one floor, 2-bedrooms, simple red brick walls, tiled hipped roof, single glazed windows, garage, small flat roof extension, lawn out the back.

A decade on, it hosts something altogether more interesting - a two-storey, 3-bedroom, zinc-roofed contemporary house, flint and timber fronted, floor to ceiling glazed living spaces, new trees, hedgerow and courtyard garden flanked by a grassy bank and wildflower sward with its own beehives. But that house (as our host, homeowner and architect designer of House 19, Heinz Richardson generously explained when we visited) is also a passive solar family home, orientated to make the most of sun’s warmth and light, storing its heat in its thermal mass, supplemented with a ground source heat pump drawing on the constant temperature of the Chiltern earth, and using that earth to keep fresh air flowing year-round at 12 degrees centigrade via an “*earth tube ventilation system*” within an airtight envelope. And it’s been quietly operating on the doorstep for six years, proving a new norm in a historic streetscape while the world catches up with its prescient sustainability agenda.

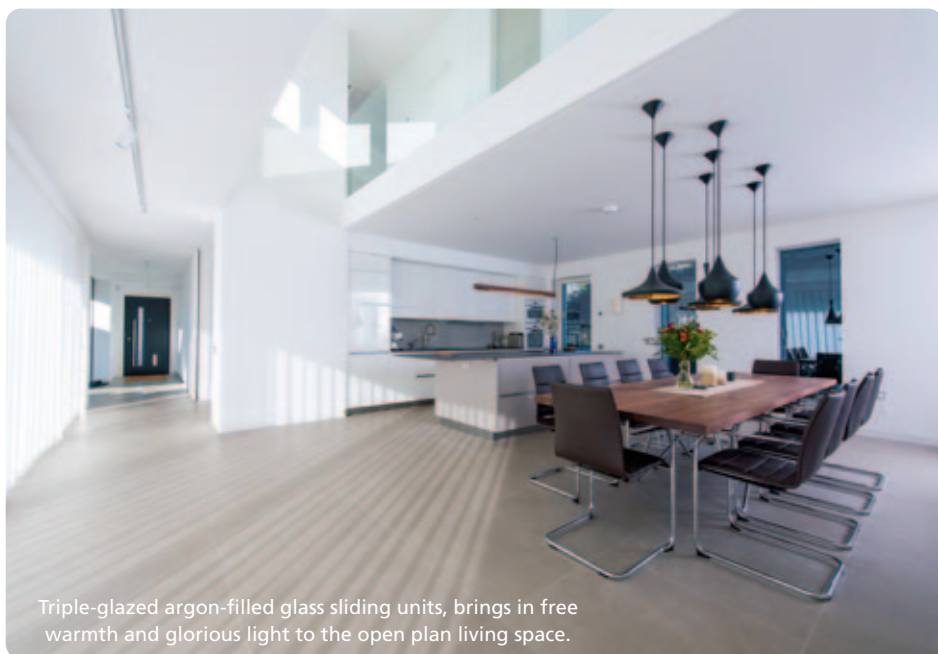


As a new build it would be easy to dismiss its applicability wider in Amersham - so much of the old town is centuries old, layered vernacular architecture, Listed, cherished, inviolable, it can't simply be demolished and built anew. And there are clearly lots of things that are done with new builds that can't be done with old buildings, in the same way. But buildings can be reimagined and innovations introduced by homeowners in response to their own constraints and opportunities (just as Amersham Museum has been reinvented), and the whole eco *"thing"* has become so much more relevant because of what's been going on with gas prices. With the abolition of VAT on heat pumps and subsidies offered from April this year the direction of travel is for an

alternative approach to home heating and deep consideration of sustainability in retrofitting.

So what does House 19 say to an Amersham of the future?

Well, first and foremost it's a home. An architect's own home to live in, not just a grand design. Connections are made that give things back to the town, gable angles that mirror traditional rooflines around, a view of a clock on the chimney that can be read on the passing school run or to call tea-time from the playing fields, an ecology roof that has seeded itself with wild wind-blown plants from the surrounding Chilterns, the things that matter that come from living in a place and understanding what works, what's missing, what could be better.



Triple-glazed argon-filled glass sliding units, brings in free warmth and glorious light to the open plan living space.

It's also designed as a home for life, with mobility and infirmity considered. There are level thresholds to the entrances and throughout the ground floor, and a ground floor office and cloakroom that can become a bedroom with ensuite if needed in the future. A *"room of requirement"* by the courtyard garden with kitchenette, washroom and independent access can accommodate friends to stay, multi-generational living, a carer live-in space, or outdoor kit, bikes and exercise equipment. Spoil from the extraction of the heat pump and foundations was put in the sunny spot at the bottom of the garden to form a bank in the lawn to catch the last of the sun's rays with a drink, or for the grandchildren to roll down or perform in.

And think again about heat pumps

not being suitable. Here's one that does work. A ground source heat pump was chosen over an air-source as it was less noisy and less bulky to house. It runs off two vertical boreholes of 90 meters and 120 meters, drilled down into the ground during construction work. Hitting the aquifer in the course of installation was solved by sleeving the boreholes, and as the system is a closed loop there is no exchange of anything other than ground heat into the pipe-work. Impressively the plant for it, looking very much like a standard mid-height fridge-freezer, fits into a small external cupboard. Its heat is channelled into underfloor heating throughout, which is admittedly harder to install in an old building, but creates a constancy of temperature, without cold pockets and hot spots.



Flint galletting forms a sharp tactile horizontal strip at eye level from the front door.

Fundamentally the reorientation of the building on its plot changed its very essence, from a building which could have been built anywhere to one which was profoundly rooted in its setting, using every virtue of the site in conjunction with its intended function. Aligning the building's main axis with School Lane gave a long southern elevation which, faced with triple-glazed argon-filled glass sliding units, brings in free warmth and glorious light to the open plan living space from sunrise to sunset, minimises the need for artificial (and costly) electric supplementary lighting, and indeed for much additional heat from the ground pump. A projecting overhang catches the angle of the sun as

it rises into summer - the weak horizontal winter light streams fully in whilst the hot overhead midday summer sun is filtered by the canopy and shaded further when needed by sliding timber screens. The bedrooms lie in the shaded and cooler northern side of the house, aiding sleep and relaxation. Other windows are opportunistically placed to give framed views of the things that make this location special – a painterly view of the church and rooftops rendered in one carefully located square, an oblique view of the cricket games at Barn Meadow (for keen lifetime cricketer Heinz) from a modern projecting oriel window looking east, a rush of plough lines in chalk sweeping up from the

allotments out of the ascending stair window. From inside you have a sense of permeability of the building to the slopes of the valley beyond, and space from the borrowed views, despite the proximity of neighbours.

Other choices ground the building lovingly in the landscape Heinz grew up in. Snapped and knapped flints clad parts of ground floor walls, a great nod to the shattered nodules scattered profusely in those surrounding fields, connecting to the millennia in the earth, echoing the vernacular of St Mary's church, clad in flint extracted from the 19th century building of the railway to Aylesbury. Their dark colours absorb heat into the solid walls, and some lovely detailing using flint galletting forms a sharp tactile horizontal strip at eye level from the front door. Flints with rusty red streaks (traditionally considered lower quality) are celebrated here with the complementary use of Corten steel in matching shades as a door canopy. Vertical timber battening in dark stained cedar, echoes weatherboarding on the Mill at the southern end of the Lane, and whilst not a local timber (beech is unsuitable for external cladding due to its fast absorption of moisture and tendency to rot), echoes a local historic use of timber that gives it a timelessness in the streetscape. Zinc roofing allows rainwater capture without contamination and funnels it into a rainwater harvesting tank where it is collected and reused for flushing and irrigation, a thoughtful inclusion in this chalk

catchment where lowering domestic water use and mains demand is critical to reduce abstraction from sensitive chalk aquifers and their rare stream habitats. The resin bonded gravel used for the harder landscape areas allows rainwater to filter through back in to the chiltern earth.

Other sites nearby have emulated some of these innovations, others in the old town may well be more limited. House 19 sought to be a dwelling with low running and maintenance costs and carbon neutral in its operation, as a home it achieves this and much more. As a town, what will Amersham look like in 20 years time when gas boilers are gone? House 19 both inspires and asks questions to the town within which it sits about what sort of place it wants to be in the future. For heat pumps to work there is a need to seal a home more effectively, secondary glazing at the least, will we be looking to replace or preserve 18th century windows in Amersham High Street? How will air exchange work in sealed buildings that are timber framed with 18th century brick frontages? There will be pockets of Amersham where more is easily possible and others where creative thinking on a budget is required. It will be interesting to see what emerges in redevelopment proposals coming forward, and what opportunities can be found to build a 21st century environment that works alongside historic fabric.

**Rebecca Tate**



# Chiltern Heritage Orchards

Supply Plums Damson  
and Prunes of the Chilterns

Under the clear skies in the spring sunlight, little clouds of blossom appear on the purple branches of the orchard trees. The Chilterns have a long tradition of fruit growing and one of the most iconic groups of fruit were the plums. Growing commercial fruit of the past with my business, Chiltern Heritage Orchards, allows people to enjoy an incredible experience of a long forgotten world of culture, cuisine and culinary delights. We are discussing Buckinghamshire, stone fruit in this article, which have complex genetics descending from wild sloes and fruits brought back from Europe and the Middle East by the Romans and later travellers in the Middle Ages.

Damson  
blossom

They include the damson or Prune/Pruin; a large group of usually oval, purple or black skinned fruits; the Bullaces, which can be rounder and sharper, Mirabelles; more common in France and popular in cooking and their close relatives, the Green Gages; which are sweeter and normally green or yellow. The true plums are normally larger and may be dessert cultivars or culinary or a mixture of both. Out of this confusion of plum nomenclature and opinion emerge some clear favourites for commercial growing. The old extensive Orchards of Pitstone and Tottenhoe which supplied a remarkable late dark cooking plum, really a thick skinned large oval damson, the Aylesbury Prune is one of the lost fruits of the Chilterns. These robust, long keeping Prunes were transported from Stations such as Tring, to markets in the Midlands and London in the 19th and early 20th Century. I grow the Aylesbury Prune together with many other local and almost extinct, national fruit cultivars. Once again, it is now possible to ensure the continued survival of the unique plums, of the Chiltern Region. Setting up and growing traditional fruit trees using Certified Organic regenerative agricultural practices has allowed these traditional fruit cultivars to make a welcome return to menus and to be available through local restaurants.



Aylesbury Prunes



Rowles Pruin

There are other less well known Buckinghamshire plums, such as Stewkley Red, a sweet tough local plum, propagated by villagers using suckers from trees and replanting them in their gardens.

We grow another excellent late summer damson plum called Langley Bullace bred at the Middle Green, Bucks Nursery by Veitch's in the 19th Century. Its dark skin and richness of flavour blends well with apples in sauces.

The range of fruits grown in Buckinghamshire orchards was once truly astonishing and many of the hedges were planted with hardy plum fruits from other parts of the British Isles. These include Cambridge Gage, a small greengage which seems to be ignored by birds and is ready to eat fresh in August, yellow Shepherds Bullaces, can still be found on the margins of old orchards in parts of Bucks.



Langley Bullace



Horned sheep  
in the orchard



Farleigh Damson grown throughout the UK, also serves well as a bountiful windbreak. I have found many of the Gloucestershire plums and prunes often grazed by sheep, grow well in the orchard. Old favourites, such as the almost lost, Rowles Pruin, Sweet Damson, Michaelmas Damson, Bradley's King Damson, Rodley Blackjack, Old Pruin, Winterbourne Magnum and Smith's Pruin, all thrive in the cool springs and late frosts of the Chilterns. The value of these cultivars is their successional cropping times beginning in late July and lasting until November, the plums, green gages, damsons and bullaces are generally stalwarts of the traditional heritage orchard. The old forgotten sheep grazed orchards of the Chilterns can now be found again, proving their resilience in providing local organic produce, over a long season in species



Farleigh Damson

rich habitat. We are aiming to expand our range of endangered local fruit and are actively looking to purchase more small suitable fields or paddocks to produce a wider range of organic fruit trees for our customers and to protect endangered fruit tree cultivars. Please contact me through our website [chilternheritageorchards.com](http://chilternheritageorchards.com) or via Instagram [#chilternheritageorchards](https://www.instagram.com/chilternheritageorchards) if you have land to sell for commercial organic historic orchard regeneration.

You can see these fruits on our year round archives on Chiltern Heritage Orchards You Tube and Instagram channels.

**Lindsay Engers**





# Amersham Museum News



## The Amersham Martyrs Community Play

Covid has affected our lives in all sorts of ways, not least the opportunity for us to come together to talk, share, laugh and create. The Amersham martyrs community play has been enjoyed by local people – both as performers and participants – in the past and we were very much looking forward to the 2021 performance.

Despite all the setbacks that the team experienced with the initial delay in 2021 and then considerable changes and concerns throughout the autumn and winter, the play went ahead, to great acclaim in March 2022. There was a reduced audience and cast but the allocated seats sold out. A wider audience was reached with a live-stream on two of the nights. These filmed performances will soon be available for people to watch again at home. The cast, directors, production team and backstage crew did a tremendous job – with some filling in for others at the last minute. We are so grateful for everyone's hard work and commitment and delighted that the team worked so hard to ensure that the play could go ahead.



## Amersham Before Plastic

Throughout the winter our mobile museum has been visiting local markets, sharing the story of how people shopped sustainably in the past. We've talked to people about shops in the past and gauged their opinions on what they would like to see changed when they shop today, from recycling, the materials used in packaging and the availability of refill and home delivery options. We've worked with local primary schools too, sharing information about packaging and how they can make sustainable choices. Our Young Curators group created a display of objects about shopping in the past in our large display case in the museum, writing

labels and creating the exhibition text.

Our partner on the project is Sustainable Amersham and the museum has now signed up as a community ally as part of a campaign to become a Plastic Free Community. The museum is one of several groups working with Sustainable Amersham to reduce the amount of single-use plastic in the town. With the group's support, the museum identified areas where they could reduce single use plastic. This included the way new items were quarantined in the museum – previously in thick plastic bags but now being trialled in reusable boxes and printing exhibition graphics on card with wooden hanging systems instead of foamboard.



## A New Design for the Museum

Over the last 18 months we've been trying to source hand-crafted items, made by local people, to sell in our small retail area. We're aware that many visitors would like to buy something connected to the history of the area, as a souvenir from their visit, or to send to friends and family. We felt that one area where we could develop something new and bespoke to the museum, would be textiles.

With the support of a grant from the South-East Museum Development Fund, we sent out a brief for an artist early in their career to create a textile inspired by the collection and local

stories. We were delighted to commission Elly Bazigos. Earlier this year she spent time exploring the museum and then created a design particularly inspired by the photographs of George Ward. We have now printed her design into different coloured fabrics, which are being made into tea towels and we hope also to develop bags and cushions. In June Elly will have an exhibition of her work in the museum.

## Amersham Roots

At the beginning of this year we started a project with another artist, Sri-Kartini Leet. Sri-Kartini has been commissioned as part of a three-year partnership between Essex Cultural Diversity Project and

Farnham Maltings, funded by the Rothschild Foundation.

Since January she has been working to creatively capture and present recollections and stories about Amersham from people who have been born since the museum opened in 1991. She has been exploring the idea of locating one's roots through significant memories, objects or places in relation to Amersham, by creating portraits of a diverse selection of people within their homes. She has also run workshops with young people, to create images of their own. The work will be displayed in an exhibition in the museum as part of Bucks Arts Weeks in June.

## New Direction

After ten happy and rewarding years in the museum, I shall be leaving in July. I've thoroughly enjoyed my time here, working with a wonderful, committed, creative and kind group of people. I relished the challenge of the new building and the project to 'reimagine' Amersham Museum and I'm incredibly proud of the way the museum has grown and developed as a result.

For me, museums are not just about historic objects or spaces; they are about the people who inhabit them at a given moment and how their experience results in positive outcomes in terms of place-making, learning, inspiration or enjoyment. The development of our community learning programme exemplifies this; over the last ten years we have expanded our work with schools, families and older people and we are now making progress to connect with the harder to reach members of those communities. We have established methods for creative work with young people through our art club and Young Curators programme and have a core group of older people engaged in our reminiscence groups. We try to involve them all in our programming as much as possible, working collaboratively on new initiatives. Increasingly museums are seen as places where we share conversations, not dictate them and I can see Amersham Museum continuing to make great strides with our co-curators in the future.

Nothing would have been possible in the last ten years without the development of a brilliant team of volunteers and the enthusiasm they have shown for what they do. I shall really miss working with them all, but I shall stay in touch and look forward to visiting and joining in events and activities in the future.

*Emily*





# The Martyrs 500

By Stan Pretty

In 2019 I could see March 2021 looming. 500 years since six of the Amersham martyrs met their fate, and five years since the Amersham Martyrs play had last been staged. I just knew that someone would eventually say “We must do it again to mark the anniversary”.



Paul Wright and Sophie Arnold as townsfolk in the Market scene.

I can't say I was excited by this prospect but as it seemed inevitable I got together early with my fellow director Sally Alford and we agreed that, if it was to happen again, then why not try to make as big a splash as possible about it to promote Amersham and our Museum. After all, there are not many places of our size that have managed something like this on four previous occasions involving so many local people researching an important part of their history and presenting it in sell-out promenade performances housed in the fine local historic church.



Emma Facer-Floate as the Penitent

Sally and I wished it to be as inclusive as possible. We wished to involve even more of the community than before, to involve local schools again, to have some signed performances and to have a full-scale student cast as well as the usual double cast. We had the agreement in principle from the Museum and, bravely, Martin Pounce took on the onerous administrative job of Producer and – yet again – Jill Mace was happy to undertake the non-stop job of Company Manager.

Ah, the best laid plans ... Along came the Pandemic. March 2021 was a non-starter. Just how much of a non-starter no-one could have guessed. We decided to postpone until the following year. March 2022, with a standby possible outdoor performance of some sort in May if March couldn't happen. The grand plans of 2019 however had to go. There was no way we could ask schools to participate as they had in the past as they had enough problems of their own. Also, would the public be prepared to attend a crowded promenade performance with a large cast in these Covid times? Indeed, would we have enough people prepared to actually BE that cast? So many imponderables. So many What Ifs.



Co-director Sally Alford with Mercy Sujay.



Sue Boshier as Joan Clark

Nevertheless, still ever hopeful that we could still meet our March dates, even if we did have to cut our ambitious plans down drastically, we decided to begin rehearsals and about 60 or so brave souls were prepared to “*give it a go*” and by early December we had a very creditable group of C16th townsfolk giving enthusiastic and energising performances in our opening market scene. Again many offered to

take on speaking roles and once again Sally and I were encouraged by those among that number who had never done anything like this before.

December, however, saw the imposition of the Government’s Plan B, which meant that we were unable to rehearse in closed spaces without masks until these restrictions were lifted. Would there now be time to prepare a production for our planned March dates? On the understanding that Plan B may be lifted towards the end of January, and – especially – because we already had a band of people, bursting with enthusiasm, ready and willing to do whatever they could to get this production on, we took the decision to press ahead. A few individual Zoom “*rehearsals*” took place but this is no way to rehearse a large cast production!



Dominic O’Connor, Emilia Catanach and Olivia Sujay

Now was the time to make another very big decision. Was a large promenade production involving so many people actually possible now? Frankly, no. Thus Sally and I decided to approach the production in a different way – a “*new production*” – that fitted more accurately the cast we had and possibly limited audience numbers when it was obvious variant cases were rising. We therefore planned a seated audience which would restrict audience numbers but hopefully encourage those who had stood on previous occasions, a single stage to reduce scaffolding and lighting requirements and other production adjustments to work within a limited budget. Our Musical Directors Rachel and Stephen cleverly recorded the choir individually and remotely and Martin pressed ahead with plans to stream and record a couple of performances. Happily we were able to retain one important piece of inclusivity by having the two planned signed performances, which were brilliantly undertaken by Helen Watson.

A very short rehearsal period from the end of Plan B to performance dates meant yet another rehearsal schedule to be drawn up and a massive commitment from our cast. This they responded to magnificently. I can honestly say that it was this enthusiasm and belief that we could get

the production on by all concerned that gave both Sally and I the impetus to continue. It could never have happened otherwise.

No sooner had the new schedule been emailed to all than the upsurge in Covid cases hit. Among others, both Sally and I tested positive on the same day and were isolating for 10 days. Following soon after was Martin, our producer. The cast still pressed on however led, happily for us, by Don our only cast member who is an experienced professional. But the cases continued day by day and in production week we ‘lost’ to Covid our Stage Manager, Lighting Designer, Musical Director and numerous cast members.



Musicians Stephen Wilcox and Rachel Hewitt



As each recovered before the end of our run they returned when they could but daily we were losing others. This unhappy state of affairs continued throughout the two weeks of the show.

Despite all this, Martyrs 500 did happen! Our sales boomed and we hastily added two extra performances. Cast members found themselves playing in alternate casts and standing in reading for missing speaking roles. We cannot thank enough our amazing cast and crew for their extraordinary resilience and determination to avoid at all costs having to cancel a performance. A recording of the final two nights is available on the Museum website.

We sadly missed the big influx of children and students from local schools who have been such a major part of our past productions, however we were thrilled this time to have some very special young people indeed who played such an important

part of this anniversary production – our children, Aileen, Emilia, Lily, Lolita, Olivia, Dominic and especially Ilya who, aged 7, played all eight performances as John Scrivenor junior, and our students, Katie, Verity, Ethan, Monty, and Sam.

And so it is farewell from Sally and myself to directing the Martyrs Play, however, as we said in the programme, we hope that others in the future will continue to mark this and other important events in Amersham's history in new and exciting ways.

**Stan Pretty**



Stan Pretty with Lolita Namitcheishvili and Ilya Namitcheishvili



An early photograph of the Library, c.1870.

## William Clarke's bookcases for William Drake at Shardeloes

The Library at Shardeloes was originally laid out by the architect-builder Stiff Leadbeater in the 1750s, the design was greatly improved by Robert Adam and alterations were made in the 1760s with further bookcases added in the 1770s. Since then the room has changed little.

In the photographs overleaf it is possible to see just how little change took place in the last century and a half.



Country Life photo 1913.

Photo : Country Life



The Library before decluttering for the Country Life photoshoot, 1913.

Photo : Amerisham Museum.



Dr Beatrice Turner, in charge at Shardeloes Maternity Home for Evacuee Mothers, 1940.



Shortly before the proposed demolition in 1956.



The Library restored December 1961.



The Library in 2011, then the home of Dulcie Gray.



## William Clarke, Joyner



Photo by Tom Lawrence.

William Clarke's most notable commission was the Library of the Society of Antiquaries for its original home at Somerset House. The room is still there but sadly no books. His much more modest commission at Shardeloes is recorded in a bill sent to William Drake in 1771.

A photograph of a handwritten bill in cursive script. The text reads: "June 6<sup>th</sup> 1771 Due of W<sup>m</sup> Drake Esq<sup>r</sup> by the hands of M<sup>r</sup> Jones the full Contents of all Demands. W<sup>m</sup> Clarke". The signature "W<sup>m</sup> Clarke" is written at the bottom right.

W<sup>m</sup> Drake Esq<sup>r</sup>

by Order of M<sup>r</sup> Cleave

To Mr Clarke Esq<sup>r</sup>

1769

The Value of a Packing Case for a Case

To 8<sup>th</sup> of Sep of the Deal

To Packing up 2<sup>d</sup> 1/2 of 10<sup>th</sup> of 10<sup>th</sup> Deal 1/2 a Box

Nails & 1/2 a Days Work

L<sup>d</sup>

3 0 10 9

0 3 10

1771

May 11<sup>th</sup>

To Two large Book Cases with Open

Pediment Cornices with Down framed Ends  
flashed & fluted. Do in Pediment Part framed

flashed & sides & Corners, Inside filled up with  
Sliding Shelves & Compartments for Writing

& V. R. Draw with brass handles & Locks

Single W. Corners

2 10 0 0

To Packing 2<sup>d</sup> 6 10 1/2 of 10<sup>th</sup> Deal 10 0 0 Days Work On 10 0 0

Paid for Warehouse, Town

0 1 0

To Going to Shards & Packing Down Case &

Imprest M<sup>r</sup> Dings & filling 2<sup>d</sup> to the book case

To 2 Days Work for 1/2 of 10<sup>th</sup> Deal 2 0 0

30

2 Mahog<sup>r</sup> 2 pair Drawers Table enclosed with  
Mat framing Quadrant Iron & David Corner

the best Knap Work & strong & well turned 2<sup>d</sup> 6 6 0

Two Mahog<sup>r</sup> Pillows with Carved Caps & fluted

fig 10<sup>th</sup> Deal & Iron Corners to the Ends of the

Table, (For Handles)

1 10 0 0

Packing 2<sup>d</sup> in 2 bed Matts

2 6

[37 7 1

Top cabinetmaker Tom Lawrence reports on his work to conserve and repair the 18th century bookpresses in the Library at Shardeloes.

# The Bookcases in the Library at Shardeloes

## Restoration of the lower doors



The lower doors in the magnificent library at Shardeloes made in Pine frame construction and painted. 14 doors were worked on. All needing the hinges tightened, and some fittings adjusted to account for movement and twisting in the doors.



Planing the underside of a door to ease function.  
Although the hinges are in good condition, some wear means removing material to allow the door to close.

It is always a pleasure to work at Shardeloes, and to improve the function of the lower doors in the library was a privilege.

As a cabinetmaker and furniture conservator, history is a core reason in my passion for the job.

I've been fortunate to work on many pieces made by excellent craftsmen over the last four centuries. What excites, is to know that it is most likely you're the first person to dismantle and examine a piece or component that has needed little attention over the years since its manufacture.

The materials and techniques have stood the test of time, and above all are a testament to craftsmanship made with intelligence and skill.





The doors are opened with a beautiful mechanism, actioned by opening the upper door to access the top of a rod, which when depressed pushes the catch as shown down to release the door. Note the curved sprung steel that pushes the door open. Hand made to a high standard and very satisfying to use.



The knob which when pressed disengages the catch with the sprung steel curve below.

**A** : A detail showing two original mid eighteenth century wood screws. Note the deep slow thread and fine edge to cut into wood efficiently.



**B** : On the left a mid 18th century screw from the bookcase. On the right a late 20th century screw showing a much shallower thread which doesn't bite as well.

Understanding the techniques and materials of a piece one is working on, is key to respecting the craftsman that made it. It is always a challenge to be able to work to this consistency, but gives huge satisfaction to experience such a tangible link to the past. **Tom Lawrence**

# Subscriptions 2022

**T**hank you to the 97% of our members who have already paid their subscription for 2022, in most cases by direct debit (using GoCardless) or, for longer-standing members, by standing order, or, for a very few, by cheque or cash. That small number who have not yet paid should have received a letter or an e-mail from me at the beginning of March reminding them of what they owe but if you are unsure feel free to phone me at 01494 728422 or e-mail [peterborrows@cantab.net](mailto:peterborrows@cantab.net). Do remember that clause 9(b) of our Constitution says :

Forfeiture of membership shall ... be automatic if the subscription of any member for any year shall remain unpaid by 30 June.

**Peter Borrows** (*Membership Secretary*)

# NOTICEBOARD

## Programme of Talks and Events

- 25 May **How Plants Control Animals**  
Botanist Dr Brenda Harold will explain how plants defend themselves against herbivores and in doing so occasionally become carnivores themselves.
- July **Summer Garden Party** \*\*
- September **Outing** \*\*
- 28 September **Chiltern Heritage Fruit Varieties**  
Lindsay Engers will talk about varieties of heritage fruits that grew widely in Buckinghamshire.
- 26 October **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**  
Followed by a talk **Despair to Hope** by Dr Andrew Shepherd, Trustee of the Fountain of Peace Charity.
- 30 November **Rediscovering William Burgess Furniture**  
A talk by Tom Lawrence.  
*(see also article by Tom Lawrence on page 46 of this Newsletter about William Clarke)*

### Amersham Society Officers

Chair	Dorothy Symes	01494 434858
Vice –Chair	Edward Copisarow	07932 152522
Secretary	Geraldine Marshall-Andrew	01494 433735
Planning Officer	George Allison	01494 434830

Website <https://amershamsociety.org>

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

\*\* We are planning the above two events and will let you have details by e-alert as soon as the dates have been agreed.