



JANUARY 2023

**AMERSHAM SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER**



Amersham - Winner of Britain in Bloom 2022. See article on page 18.

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Cover photograph by Elena Morgan: Amchor in rehearsal prior to their concert in St. Mary's church on 3/12/22.

Editorial

Happy New Year – the Society's 67th in fact. I was sitting in front of my lap-top watching the first snowflakes of winter fall, wondering what to include in my first editorial when two topics became obvious: to recognise those committee members who, after periods in office in various capacities, have just relinquished some of their responsibilities, and who is taking on these mantles. And to give you a teaser of what will be in the newsletter this year.

As an irregular attender of the evening talks myself Dorothy Symes was the face of the Society so far as I was concerned, always there, always calm and courteous - the result, Edward Copisarow suggested at our AGM, of a career as a diplomat, the culmination of which was preordained: her becoming the Society's Chair! Dorothy served on the committee for 11 years, the last 4 as Chair and Newsletter editor. If that was not enough, she also wrote reports and articles for the Newsletter and chaired the Events Committee, organising our annual programme of lectures, outings and summer parties. For much of her time as the Society Chair the Committee consisted of just 6 members, so her leadership counted, especially when taking the Society through Covid. Thank you Dorothy. I am relieved to say Dorothy is not leaving; she is staying on as the Events Committee Chair, so will still be around with wise advice gently given.

Continuity is assured as a long-term member of the Society, who needs no introduction, the hugely energetic Edward Copisarow, is taking on Dorothy's role as chair. Edward has been a committee member for the past 8 years and became Vice-Chair 4 years ago.

George Allison held the Planning brief for the Society for the past 10 years and has decided now is the time to "retire". Aside from an 18-month break (when Geraldine Marshall-Andrew deputised for him) George kept a close eye on all significant planning applications and recently has been very much involved in the Maltings development (see report page 28). George has also served a spell as Acting Chair and we're very glad he's agreed to stay on the Committee for one more year.

I'm delighted to report that the Society now has 9 committee members, two new members being co-opted during the past year with their places ratified at the AGM in October. One is Carol Chesney, who is taking over the role of Planning from George Allison. The other new member is me, John Catton. I'm relieving Dorothy as Newsletter editor and taking on the role of Vice-chair. Finally David Cash has, as we go to press, just become our third new member. He is extremely active within the life of Amersham, is a Bloomer (see below), and is now keen to further promote awareness and the value of the Amersham Society in Top Amersham.

Amersham is a small town full of people with many passions. You don't have to look hard to see how active its citizens are, the most obvious example, thanks to the ceaseless endeavours of the "Bloomers," is that Amersham was crowned the overall winner of Britain in Bloom last October (see article by Steve and Michelle Catanach page 18). We're awash with music making, a theme I want to return to in each edition this year (see page 12 and learn all about Amchor) and through history we've had our fair share of religious dissenters (read about the Friends Meeting House on page 24).

The Amersham Society organises 8 talks each year which pick on perhaps lesser known aspects of the town's history, opens our eyes as to what is happening now and what local organisations are doing now to give us a brighter future. You can find reports on the last three talks of 2022 in this issue.

I want to take a small detour at this point to comment on our website, designed and managed by Elena Morgan, as many back issues of our newsletter can be found there. Elena is in the lengthy process of downloading them all (!), which will create a wonderful historical record not only of the Society but local matters relevant at the time particular newsletters were published. Please do have a look at it. Again, as a newbie, I was simply amazed by its layout, content, links and ease of navigation.

Looking forward: What connects a past Amersham MP (1624 and 1628), the honey bee, Liberty's and local spies and subversives? They are the eclectic topics of our next 4 talks. These are organised by our small Events Committee: Dorothy Symes, Geraldine Marshall-Andrews and Yvonne Suckling. Full details can be found in the enclosed "2023 Programme" and on the back-cover under "Noticeboard". If you'd like to try your hand at writing up one of these for the May newsletter, please phone or email me or Dorothy, our details are on the back of the enclosed annual programme.

Our meetings are as a rule held on the last Wednesday on each month in the Kings Chapel: doors open at 7:30pm giving time for a coffee / tea prior to the talks commencing at 8:00pm. But please note that the day of the first 3 has changed simply due to the booking schedule of the Kings Chapel. The programme is correct as at the time of going to press and any changes will be posted on our website, plus you will be reminded each month of the changed day via email from our website manager, Elena.

Finally we'd love to hear from you, a fresh pair of eyes: your thoughts, comments, likes and dislikes, *"Letter to the Editor,"* ideas as to future talks, events we could mount and *"campaigns"* we might adopt, I'm at:

richard.catton1@ntlworld.com

John Catton

Subscriptions 2023

This note is to remind you that your **Annual Subscription** to the Amersham Society became due on 1st January 2023. The amount remains unchanged at **£11.50** for an individual member, or **£17** for two family members living at the same address. We do not issue membership cards. Almost certainly, by the time you read this, you will have already paid your subscription on about the 2nd January either by direct debit or by standing order, without having to do anything. Thank you.

If you pay by **direct debit** via our agent GoCardless (our preferred method) your bank statement will say something like GoCardless (AmershamSoc) or perhaps something less comprehensible.

If you pay by **standing order** (*no longer available to new members*), nearly all our members have now corrected them to reflect the increase in subscription in 2017, but if you have not you will soon receive an e-mail or a letter from me asking for the balance. If, sadly your partner or spouse died during the year, did you remember to change the subscription from **£17** to **£11.50**? We cannot change your standing order – you have to do that. Of course, we are happy to accept the excess as a small donation. If you would like to pay in future by direct debit, rather than standing order, please e-mail me at peterborrows@cantab.net and I can arrange for that to be set up.

If you are one of the handful of people who pay by **cash or cheque**, almost certainly you have not yet paid. Please send the money to me at Troye Cottage, 32 Whielden Street, Amersham, Bucks, HP7 0HU. **Please do it now, before you forget!** Alternatively, if you would like to pay in future by direct debit, please e-mail me at peterborrows@cantab.net and I can arrange for both the 2023 and subsequent payments to be taken by direct debit.

If you are not sure how you pay, or for any other problems, please e-mail me at peterborrows@cantab.net or phone **01494 728422**.

Finally, do you receive the E-alerts which we send out about once a month? These give you reminders of forth-coming events and sometimes include new information not in the printed programme, eg social events. If you are not receiving this, it's probably because we don't have your e-mail address – please e-mail me at peterborrows@cantab.net. If you are two family members living at the same address, it can be helpful if we have both addresses on our database. Again, just e-mail me with the information.

Dr Peter Borrows Amersham Society Membership Secretary



Greys Court and Henley-on-Thames

Peter McLoughlin reports on the Amersham Society
outing to Greys Court and a Thames cruise
from Henley on Friday 9th September 2022.



On a September morning threatening rain 23 members of the Amersham Society set off to visit the National Trust property of Greys Court near Henley-on-Thames followed by afternoon tea-cruising the Thames.

Greys Court the former home of Sir Felix Brunner sits high in the Chiltern Hills above Henley. The house is Tudor in style but the site is full of history and the de Grey family were settled here by the time of the Domesday Book.

In 1347 the 1st Lord de Grey, one of the original Knights of the Garter was granted a licence to crenellate. Most of the fortifications are now in ruins but the modest Tudor House which was built in the courtyard is still very much intact.

Only four families have lived on the site. The de Greys from 1086 to 1485, the Knollyses 1514 – 1688, the Stapletons from 1724 – 1934 and the Brunners.

The Sir Felix Brunner with his wife and four sons lived at Greys court from 1937 and Lady Brunner continued to live at Greys Court, after it was passed to the National Trust in 1969, until her death in 2003.

Greys Court has the feel of a lived in family home. There is a beautiful collection of porcelain in two cabinets in the entrance Hall.

In one of the downstairs rooms there are a number of paintings by the Welsh artist Frank Brangwyn 1867 – 1956.

At the top of the plain pine staircase there is a decorated trunk of German origin and a window containing a number of 16th and 17th century stained glass panels of Swiss origin.

Overall the house has a very liveable feel.

Greys Court is notable for its wisteria (sadly not in flower) and a series of wonderful walled gardens in the shadow of the remains of an ancient tower.

Lunch was taken in the Cowshed once the home of Sir Felix and Lady Brunner's prize winning herd of Guernsey cattle.



Tea awaits on the Hibernia

It was still fine when the group left Greys Court for Henley where we boarded the Hobbs cruiser Hibernia for our Thames sail.

The saloon was laid for tea with a collection of old bone china cups and saucers and a table heaving with a variety of homemade cakes.

Our guide pointed out places of interest as we sailed upstream to Marsh Lock and beyond before turning just before Shiplake and heading back to Henley. We learned that the many small islands in the Thames, some inhabited, are called eyots. We also heard about Swan upping which takes place as far up river as Abingdon.

We sailed by the St George and Dragon Pub mentioned in Jerome K. Jerome's "Three men in boat" as well as Park Place the most expensive House on the River sold for £150 million pounds. There are some wonderful properties on this stretch of

the Thames. It must be one of the most pleasant places to live in England.

Having enjoyed tea and a slice of cake we continued our return trip to Henley in warm sunshine, so much for the forecast!

As we had time our skipper took us further down stream passing under Henley Bridge (1786) which has a carved head of Isis on the upstream side and Father Thames on the downstream side. The source rivers Thame and Isis gave the Roman name Thamisis later Thames.

We then sailed down a length of the Regatta Course before returning to Henley and our transport.

Returning to Amersham it started to rain as we descended Gore Hill!

Dorothy and Geraldine had organised a memorable day out so close to home which was very much appreciated by all Society members.

Peter McLoughlin

Fountain of Peace

Children's Foundation UK

A presentation by Dr Andrew Shepherd to the Amersham Society,
Wednesday 26th October 2022

Dr Andrew Shepherd, a retired General Medical Practitioner from the North West of England opened his presentation by saying that those present could not possibly imagine what it is like to live in the grinding poverty found in the Kyenjojo region of Western Uganda where the charity Fountain of Peace is based.



Peace Ruharuzi the
inspiration behind the
foundation.

The Foundation was the inspiration of a Ugandan lady called Peace Ruharuzi. As a child she longed for an education but she was born into a struggling family of fourteen children and, education was one of many unaffordable luxuries.

Peace spent much of her childhood being passed between family members during which time she experienced neglect and abuse. There appeared to be no way out for her and she became hardened to fending for herself, until thrown an unexpected lifeline. Peace was registered with Compassion International which had a child sponsorship programme attached to the local Baptist church. Here she not only received an education, but also the opportunity to rise above her circumstances. With the support of Compassion and other sponsors Peace went on to study at Makerere University Business School, Kampala in Uganda, and Plymouth University in the UK. She subsequently worked with Compassion in both Uganda and the UK until 2006 when the Fountain of Peace Children's Foundation was founded.

Dr Andrew Shepherd took a sabbatical from his medical practice in 2003 to spend time in Tanzania, East Africa which changed his life. Soon after his return, whilst attending a conference in the UK he and his wife met Peace and subsequently undertook to help with the launch of her Foundation. He explained that the Foundation (FOP) provides orphaned, often as a result of maternal death, and abandoned children with a loving Christian home where they receive all the care and practical support they need to thrive.

This is achieved initially in the Babies' Home. The babies who come into the Home are usually malnourished, frail and sometimes in need of round the clock support from a team of nannies.



After spending the early years of their lives in the Babies Home, the children are moved on to one of the family units when they are about two or three years of age. Here, up to eight children are cared for by a full time House mother and a nanny, their permanent home until adulthood.

As of October 2022, FOP was responsible for the care of 68 children,

ranging from 2 months to 10 years of age. At this time there were seven family homes with two further homes, catering for the needs of older children, currently under construction. Here the children will learn the responsibilities necessary to help provide for their siblings, doing domestic chores and learning to grow their own produce.

For Peace Ruharuza education was the key to breaking the cycle of poverty and FOP has not neglected that aspect.

In addition to supporting the children in the FOP programme, help is also given to many local children enabling them to receive an education. Until 2013, most of them had no access to education because the nearest school was too far away.

With the help of generous donors, FOP built the original Rwenjaza Hillside Nursery and Primary School. Now, following the construction, in the last 4-5 years, of a permanent structure the school has enrolled up to 500 local children. The intention is to extend the facility to include secondary and vocational training for young people as they grow up.

FOP is grateful to have received help with resources from schools in the UK. In addition they are seeking to expand school partnerships around the UK. More recently FOP have teamed up with Harper Green School in Bolton, Lancashire and are actively seeking ways in which they can work together for the benefit of students in both countries.



As well as looking after abandoned children FOP is seeking to empower the local community. Co-operation in acquiring and developing land has created local employment opportunities.

Visitors from both the UK and New Zealand have also been able to undertake community projects to provide better living conditions for those in the local area. For example, constructing / rebuilding community water wells.

FOP has a 40 acre plot of farmland which is used to produce crops which is a step towards self-sufficiency. The construction of a farmhouse has

commenced using local labour in making bricks and in building new facilities, including storage for grain and secure shelter for machinery.

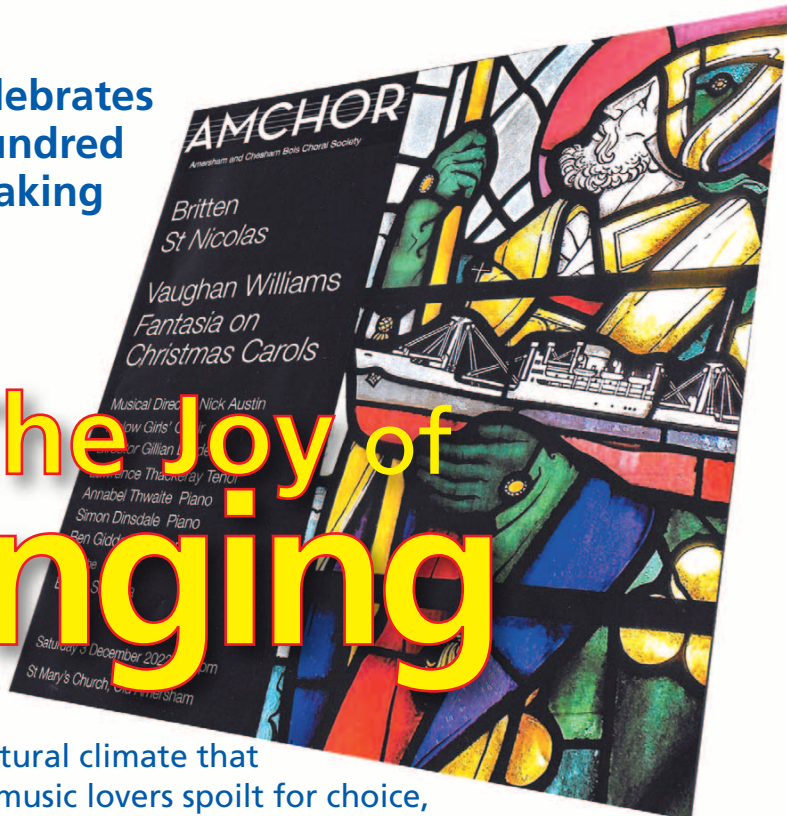
FOP is going from strength to strength but it needs money. Sponsorship and donations are forthcoming from the UK and New Zealand but there is always a need for more. If you can help any contribution would be gratefully received. Every penny given goes directly to funding the work of the Foundation. To donate visit the FOP web site

www.fountainofpeace.net

John Suckling

**Amchor celebrates
nearly a hundred
years of making
music**

The Joy of Singing



In a lively cultural climate that leaves local music lovers spoilt for choice, the Amersham and Chesham Bois Choral Society is justly proud of its enthusiastic following. Here, Jean Slater, one of its members, shares the secret of its success.

Singing together is said to leave us feeling happier, healthier and generally refreshed. Amchor members would be the first to agree. Add to this the weekly pleasure of our friendly rehearsals, that special thrill of concerts performed with professional orchestras and superb soloists, and the glow of applause for hard work well rewarded, and it's easy to understand why Amchor has been making music in the heart of the community for nearly a hundred years.

The Amersham and Chesham Bois Choral Society of today – now Amchor

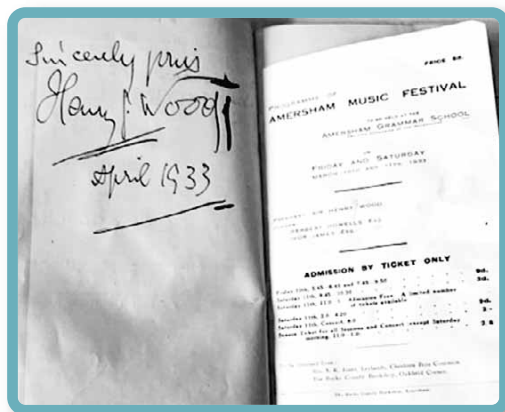
for short – is a well-regarded choir of some 60 singing members, who come together from a variety of backgrounds and locations to embark on a repertoire ranging widely from Monteverdi to Vivaldi, Handel, Haydn, Mozart and Rossini through more modern composers such as Lauridsen, Britten and Rutter. We meet on Monday evenings at Amersham Free Church under the baton of Music Director Nick Austin, who pushes us to strive for ever higher standards but has that magical gift of ensuring that rehearsals are *always* fun.

Familiar and famous names

Amchor owes everything to the passion and commitment of its Music Directors. The Society was formed in 1928 or 29 by Philip James, a prominent Amersham resident and Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum. Our earliest archive item is the programme shown here of The Amersham Music Festival of 1933 - President Sir Henry Wood - in which Amchor played its part. At least two concerts are known to have been staged during the War years, after which Philip James based rehearsals at Heatherton House school. In 1948 leadership passed to Edwin Crawford, the English and Music master of Dr Challoner's Grammar School, and rehearsals moved to the Challoner's old school hall. 1959 saw the first of the Society's concerts in the new school hall, which was also the first occasion for which choir members donned Amchor's formal concert attire.

Throughout the 1960s and 70s, under the leadership of Michael Pelloe, the choir grew in size and experience and was able to tackle major works with confidence. Dame Felicity Lott, our Amchor President, made her first solo appearance with the choir in 1977.

Ian Hooker became our conductor in 1981 and led the choir for a heady, heyday period of 34 years. Ian will be well known to many Amersham



families as the former Head of Music at Dr Challoner's Grammar School, Music Director of the County Youth Orchestra, organist at St Mary's and more besides. In the formative years of Ian's tenure, Amchor's 140 members enjoyed some exciting musical experiences. In 1996 we travelled to Bensheim, Amersham's twin town, to perform Haydn's *Creation* with the Bensheim choral society, who paid a return visit to perform Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* with Amchor, Bucks schools and the County Youth Orchestra in the Albert Hall. As a result of this, Amchor and the Youth Orchestra were invited to give a repeat performance in the Millennium Dome. In 2021 we took a trip to Florida to sing with St Lucie Chorale, who made their return visit three years later to perform Verdi's *Requiem* with Amchor and Bucks schools, also in the Albert Hall.

Our programme today

St Mary's Church, Old Amersham, is now the much-loved setting for Amchor's two major concerts, performed in May and December each year. Recent repertoire has included such major works as Haydn's *The Creation*, Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius*, Mendelssohn's *Elijah* and Vaughan Williams's *Sea Symphony* amongst a lively variety of well and lesser-known pieces. Thanks to a generous legacy left to us by Major-General H.A. Lascelles, a firm supporter of Amchor, audience and singers enjoy wonderful music accompanied by professional orchestras boasting some outstanding instrumentalists, together with top-flight soloists, many of whom are students of The Royal Academy of Music and The Royal College of Music who are just embarking on their professional careers.

In spring, our annual Mini-Concert with Tea & Cake sparks a serious bake-off within the Amchor ranks. Choral classics and tables groaning with goodies make this a family favourite. The 2022 Mini-Concert drew a full house which even called the gallery into use. Donations for the tea and cake added

an impressive £750 contribution to the help Ukraine fund. Our summer season is rounded off with a Bring and Sing to sample new works or old favourites, and carols performed for a local charity form the Amchor winter finale.

New members and Friends of Amchor

Amchor is a friendly group, bound together by a love of music – and cake. Whilst some of us are seasoned singers, not everyone has joined with musical experience. We welcome new members to all sections of the choir, particularly tenors who are everywhere in short supply. Sight reading is not essential, although the ability to read music is certainly an asset and everyone must be prepared to practise as necessary at home. Potential members are cordially invited to 'try us out' at three rehearsals, free of charge. Alternatively, you might consider becoming a Friend of Amchor. Friends benefit from reserved seating at our concerts, for an annual donation of just £25.

Jane, our Amchor Secretary, is a first point of contact for all enquiries. Do get in touch with her on hon.sec@amchor.com. We will be delighted to hear from you.

Our Amchor Concert Programme for 2023

Sunday 26 February, Amersham Free Church –

Anthems and Spirituals: afternoon concert with tea and cake.

Saturday 13 May, St Mary's Church –

Vivaldi Gloria and Haydn Little Organ Mass.

Saturday 2 December, St Mary's Church – **Brahms German Requiem.**

Details are on www.amchor.com

Chiltern Heritage Fruit Varieties

Report on the talk by
Lindsay Engers

Lindsay with his Annie
Elizabeth Apple tree.

In his timely article in our May Newsletter, published as local fruit trees were covered in promising blossom, Lindsay Engers described the long tradition of fruit growing in the Chilterns. In particular, he drew attention to the large variety of stone fruits, plums, damsons and greengages that were widely cultivated in the past and are again now grown organically and commercially in our area.

Portland Horned Sheep,
a very rare and ancient breed.

In September after the summer break we were delighted to welcome to our meeting at Kings Chapel Lindsay, who is the owner of Chiltern Heritage Orchard. Lindsay started the traditional mixed fruit orchard in 2016 and spoke to us about the amazing variety of fruits that had been grown in the Chilterns in the past. He had introduced to his own orchard many features common to the orchards of the nineteenth century following three simple principles:

- **Historical knowledge of reliable cultivars and their growing requirements.**
- **Organic and regenerative growing techniques which produce highly flavoured crops.**
- **The use of diverse ecological environmental practices to support the crop through beneficial insects, birds and bats.**

In considering the growing needs of the fruits, tree canopy training is narrow and pencil or pyramid pruned, the orchard is continuously grassed and grazed by sheep and lambs in the spring. No weedkiller is used so that this method provides sustainable habitats for beneficial insects, “the helpers” such as bees, ladybirds, butterflies and hoverflies.



Many of the fruits grown in the past are no longer grown commercially and had become almost extinct. They were often replaced by a few varieties, many of which are now grown with the use of pesticides and fertilisers and lack the intensity of flavour and wonderful taste of the fruits from a bygone age. Chiltern Heritage Orchard aims to bring back flavour to their fruits now being sold and works closely with local restaurants and various artisan food businesses. Lindsay mentioned the organic ciders made from the fruits supplied by his orchard. The orchard grows over a hundred varieties of apples, over twenty varieties of pears and as we read in the May article, many varieties of plums. The fruit grown on Chiltern Heritage Orchard cannot at present be bought by the general public, but is mainly sold to restaurants and producers of juices and ciders.

Brandy
Perry Pear



Chisel Jersey
Cider Apple



10 Commandments
Cider Apple



Quince Krymsk



There are other benefits from this organic method of growing commercial crops in addition to supporting generally the ecosystem. It also actively encourages insects and wildlife to the orchard. Many of the fruits grown in this system have also been shown to have a higher vitamin C content, higher volumes of soluble and insoluble fibres, sometimes better keeping qualities. And of course a great advantage for the consumer is that these fruits have

delicious and more varied tastes, good for our often jaded palates used to so little variety in the fruits that dominate the market now.

The pictures provided by Lindsay of some of the fruits grown by him and his team provide a small selection of the different types of heritage fruit saved for the future and grown commercially in the orchard.

Dorothy Symes

Amersham - Winner of Britain in Bloom UK 2022!

In October, Amersham received the ultimate accolade of being crowned the **OVERALL** winner of the 2022 RHS Britain in Bloom competition. Amersham was also named the winner of the **Children and Young People's** Participation Award and the RHS discretionary Sustainable Gardening Award, as well as one of only two entrants to receive a Certificate of Achievement for Innovation in Community Engagement. While Amersham was rooting for Best Town against some tough competition, the result was far more than ever expected and testament to the dedication of our colleagues at the Town Council, bloom volunteers, 1st Chesham Bois Scout Leaders, businesses, schools and many local groups — a truly collaborative community effort.



The bloom year began in September 2021 with the installation of the Met 1 steam train display at Oakfield Corner, which was planted out with permanent planting in October and officially unveiled in December. The project was undertaken in partnership with Leaders of the 1st Chesham Bois Scout Group, led by Andy Honour and was funded by over ten local groups and businesses, including the Amersham and Villages Community Board. Train enthusiasts have travelled from afar to visit the replica which has become a key attraction in Amersham-on-the-Hill.

Each autumn, the beds and borders around the town are planted with spring flowering bulbs (daffodils and tulips) to ensure that Amersham remains colourful throughout the

seasons. These bulbs are lifted at the end of the flowering season and repurposed each year - native bulbs, e.g., daffodils (*narcissus pseudo narcissus*), bluebells and crocus, are left in situ.

In January 2022, residents joined the final stage of the community tree plant at Willow Wood, completing a decade-long legacy project that has seen 8,000 native trees planted by over 1500 members of the community, including many school children. The trees were mulched using compost generated from our Christmas tree collection and recycling scheme that, since its inception two years ago, has saved approximately 18 tonnes of waste, significantly reduced the use of commercially bought mulch, and raised over £5,000 for Amersham in Bloom projects.



In previous years, Amersham in Bloom has primarily focused on increasing the vibrancy of the town through its planting and floral displays. While the group continued to make aesthetic enhancements, this year's key focus shifted to increasing biodiversity, conservation and sustainability while improving the local environmental quality of Amersham. A great example of this is the introduction of more sustainable planting, including a heavy emphasis on bee-friendly pollinators and wildflowers to create corridors of nectar-rich flowers throughout the town.

The award-winning, formally designed Memorial Gardens, comprising The Peace Garden (with wildflower lawn) and sensory garden (with pollinator bed), have become somewhat of a community hub as well as an area of ecological interest (while remaining respectful of the gardens' significance and heritage). Many of the traditional annual borders were replaced with sustainable pollinator-friendly varieties, including two large beds of salvia hot lips. Three of our four 'signature' brick beds—designed by local schoolchildren and located at the

entrances of the town — were replanted with sustainable, drought-resistant plants such as sedums. 83 street signs were planted with bee-friendly plants while many of the grass verges became ‘no mow’ areas and rewilded with wildflowers. And let’s not forget the newest addition to Sycamore Corner: The Platinum Jubilee Pollinator Bed, complete with stag ‘hotel’, bug ‘castle’, and twenty-one bees ‘swarming’ over a bed of herbaceous pollinator plants. The bed - created in partnership with the leaders of the 1st Chesham Bois Scout Group and sponsored by Rotary Club of Amersham, Amersham and District Residents Association, Amersham Action Group and Barnett Waddingham - was created to raise awareness of (and provide support to) pollinators.

As part of the Council’s commitment to improving resource



management, we have changed our watering practices. Underground watering systems have been installed in the Memorial Gardens and in the annual bed at Sycamore Corner, as well as a rainwater harvesting system at Pondwicks. Additionally, more recycling bins were installed, while we have encouraged visitors to bring reusable cups to the tea hut during band concerts, to reduce waste. An Amersham themed reusable tote bag, made from recycled plastic taken from the ocean, has also been launched, with all profits reinvested back into bloom. Bags are available from the Town Council offices (£6 a bag).



Through the Amersham in Bloom initiative, we have increased engagement, most notably with community groups and young people. We have also worked in partnership with many schools' eco-councils, as well as advising on more sustainable planting practices within schools. The Council's long-standing partnership with Stony Dean School is still going strong, with a group of pupils attending weekly sessions to weed, sow, litter-pick, and enthusiastically carry out any task asked of them. Green and Blue, a collection of stories and poems by young people to raise environmental awareness and inspire change, was published in June and officially launched at Eco-Fest, the Council's

first children's environmental festival. Year seven, eight and nine students from Amersham School produced a multi-canvas polyptych with

the theme 'Think Globally, Act Locally' which now takes pride of place at the Chilterns Lifestyle Centre.

The bloom calendar also saw the inauguration of a new project to paint BT Openreach street furniture with pollinator-themed artwork. While two are complete (with a third in the pipeline), the Council is currently in the process of seeking permission from BT Openreach and Virgin Media to paint more boxes in the coming year, with a view to inviting local artists of all ages to paint them.

Of course, so much more went into the 2022 bloom campaign with so many unsung heroes working tirelessly behind-the-scenes to keep Amersham looking beautiful and to ensure that the



The Britain in Bloom awards ceremony at RHS Lindley Hall on 10 October 2022.
 Left to right - Councillor **Mark Roberts** (Town Mayor), **Rachel de Thame**, **Carole Taylor** (Bloom volunteer), **Steve Catanach** (Town Clerk - community, communications and services), **Jill Mace**, **Morwyn Davies** and **David Cash** (Bloom volunteers).

town looked its absolute best for both the regional and national judging days. From the last-minute litter picks and pavement scrapes to the chauffeuring of the judges and presentations, these wonderful awards – the national result announced live on BBC’s *The One Show* to a group of volunteers in the Memorial Gardens – epitomise how working as a community can positively impact the local environment. While the unwavering and dedicated efforts of our colleagues at the Town Council and Councillors must not be dismissed, it is the collaboration between the Council,

bloom volunteers, 1st Chesham Bois Scout Leaders, businesses, schools and community groups that, through the bloom initiative, enable Amersham to thrive!

And this is just the beginning...

While Amersham won’t be entering the bloom competition for a while, exciting projects are already being planned for next year, bringing yet more colour, art, innovative displays, sustainable practices, and even a children’s *Little Bloomers eco-group*, to the community.

Steve and Michelle Catanach

Ever wondered about the origins of the Friends' Meeting House in Whielden Street? Amersham Society member and author **Peter Schweiger** gives us a glimpse of its history using his and extensive research by **Ann Flood**.

All Ways Walk Cheerfully

The Quaker Meeting House is a little way out of the centre of Amersham in Whielden Street just before the Hospital. The oldest part of the building is a cottage built about 1627. Amersham had its share of free thinkers with the Martyrs in 1521. In the 1650s George Fox started saying the Established church was not the only way to find God, and many people followed him. One of his sayings was *“Be patterns, be examples ... that your life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of god in every one”*. There was no need for clergy if there was something of God in everyone and so a group of people could find their own guidance from ‘the Light’ within, with no need for a vicar. Today, Quakers espouse three basic ideas: Truth, Simplicity and Peace, something of God.

The first Amersham Quakers met to worship quietly and in secret in one another's homes, including in the living room of the cottage next door to the present Meeting House. When James II relaxed the previously prohibitive legislation against Dissidents (wishing to favour Catholics, being himself a crypto-Catholic) it became possible to build a bigger room out from the cottage,

which around 1685 had become too small. In the 18th century that was added to with an extension. Cunningly constructed vertically moving wooden shutters were incorporated between the rooms, so making the accommodation more versatile. The building is Grade 2 star-listed because of the shutters. The meeting room has benches and the walls are plain white washed so that there are fewer distractions. There are no ‘church services’ as usually understood, but Meetings for worship, during which one listens inwardly. When anyone feels moved to contribute an insight to the others in the room, they are free to do so. Usually the Meetings are on a Sunday morning from 11 until noon. It is very rare that Meetings are disturbed by un-warranted speakers, but should that happen then Elders are present who may take such persons aside and attempt to help.

In 1655 the civil war was over, and the Roundhead Commonwealth was to last until 1660. This war had not been a social war, but political and religious, a war of ideas. Men were encouraged to read their Bibles and seek their own salvation. Amersham was a stronghold of Lollard. Even John Knox had preached in Amersham Church in 1553.



In 1660 the King was restored, together with Parliament, Law and the Bishops, the Prayer Book and the Anglican attitude to religion. Religious non-conformists were persecuted under the Laws of the Clarendon Code, the object of which was to prevent the revival of the Roundhead party.

The Quaker community had grown fast and suffered persecution more than any other sect, because of a steadfastness which was all the more remarkable at such a time of change. Their patience and meekness under suffering drew many more followers to them.

Besse's *Sufferings of Friends* published in 1753 lists the causes of these sufferings: for refusing to pay tithes, to pay rates for "*superstitious uses*" (e.g. upkeep of churches) and for refusing to swear, for not doffing their hats when meeting their supposed 'betters', for meeting publicly for worship, for publishing Truth to others, for withholding priests' fees (for marriages,

burials, etc.) and finally for their testimony against war.

In 1667 Ralph Trumper of Amer-sham was imprisoned for not paying tithes by Thomas Crawley, priest. He owed £16 in tithes and had goods or chattels taken from him worth £52. Before becoming a Quaker he had leased a farm with a covenant to pay the Church rates, "*which afterwards he was convinced in his conscience he ought not to do*". Sir William Drake arrested him and sent him to prison. After some time he applied to the Courts of King's Bench and Chancery, in the latter of which he obtained an injunction to stop the proceedings at Common Law, but before the service of that injunction Sir William died and he was discharged. In 1660 he was again arrested on that charge by James Perrot, who had been Sir William's steward and was his executor. Upon this he was again imprisoned and "*put to much trouble and charged but an error in the proceedings obliged Perrot to drop his suit*".

In July 1665 a more dramatic incident had taken place, graphically described by Thomas Ellwood in his autobiography. In May 1664 the Conventicle Act had been passed which forbade Quaker Meetings. A well loved Friend Edward Perot or Parrett died in Amersham, and he had given an orchard “at the Towns End” to be used as a burial ground. (*That is where the Meeting House is now*) Many Friends from the neighbourhood met on the appointed day for his funeral. After a meeting for Worship in his house, “the body was taken up and borne on Friends’ shoulders along the street”. Suddenly one of the Justices of the Peace, a barrister Ambrose Bennett of Bulstrode Park, rushed out of an Inn (thought to be the Griffin [currently (2022) a branch of the ASK restaurant chain]) “with the constables and a Rabble of Rude Fellows, whom he had gathered together”. Ambrose Bennett had heard of the funeral as he rode through Amersham in the morning on his way to Aylesbury Assizes, and that many would attend it, so he had stayed on. He drew his sword, struck one of the bearers; who stood firm, so that he was forced to push the coffin from the bearers’ shoulders, so that it fell to the middle of the road where it lay all day, and was finally forcibly removed at nightfall from the widow, and was buried in the unconsecrated part of the churchyard. Meanwhile Thomas Ellwood and others were taken to the Inn, put under guard, another Justice Sir Thomas Clayton arrived and picked out ten, of whom Thomas Ellwood was one, and committed them to Aylesbury gaol.

“When the Justices had delivered us prisoners to the constable, it being then late in the day, which was the seventh of the week, he, (not willing to go so far Aylesbury - nine long miles) with us that night, nor to put the town to the charge of keeping us there that night and the First Day and Night following) dismissed us upon our parole to come to him again at a set hour on the second day morning, whereupon we all went home to our respective Habitations, and coming to him punctually according to Promise were by him (without guard) conducted to the prison”. They were charged, and on refusing to pay the fine, were kept in gaol a month”.

During that month Thomas Ellwood had been concerned that John Milton would be coming to the cottage he owned in Chalfont St. Giles, escaping the Plague in London, and arrive unwelcomed. When Tom – who acted as the blind Milton’s amanuensis – was released from gaol, Tom was given the manuscript of “*Paradise Lost*” to read and comment on. Later Tom asked Milton, “*And what of Paradise Found?*” That inspired John Milton to write “*Paradise Regained*”. Jean Archer, one time Mayor of Amersham wrote about this in her book, “*Tales of Old Buckinghamshire*”.

The life and history of a Meeting House depends entirely upon the lives and conduct of its members; it seems that in the 1670s weekday Meetings were being neglected by Missenden, Amersham, Chesham and Wooburn Quakers. This was viewed by the ‘weightier’ community members as a mark of lack of resolve, and rebuked in the following terms: “*O what hath taken*



you off? Let not that Testimony fall in your streets that it may not be told there was once a Meeting, of the people called Quakers in Amersham but it is come to nothing". [words taken from the Minute of a business meeting held June 1672]

By the middle of the 19th century the Amersham Quaker community had dwindled to fewer than four Friends. In 1850 the Meeting House was closed for Quaker worship and leased to the Wesleyan Methodists. The local Quakers could still use it by prior arrangement, such as for a funeral, since the premises remained in Quaker ownership. The Methodists moved out to their new premises in the High street in the 1890s, and a variety of tenants were in occupation.

But the coming of the Metropolitan line brought Quaker families again to the area and some felt the need to reopen the Meeting House, which they achieved in 1917. The property had been in a bad state of repair and rat-infested, but by 1922 a portion of the property could be

used as a place for meeting for worship, once a month; gradually tenants departed, order was restored and finally the whole property came back for Quakers to use.

Today, Quakers in Amersham remember with gratitude Stephen and Edith Gloyne along with George and Emily Bolam, who were the prime movers in the opening of the Meeting House. George Bolam, with his first wife Emily and later his second wife Mary, was caretaker at the Meeting House until 1972. He was a fine craftsman and although all he did at the Meeting House was to clean it up and repair the fabric, one can see his workmanship in the neighbouring churches at Great Missenden (children's corner), Hedgerley (reading desk) and Stoke Poges (oak screen), all created in his workshop here in Amersham. His tools have been donated to the Amersham Museum.

Peter Schweiger

Peter's independently published book is titled "[All Ways Walk Cheerfully.](#)"

Planning Applications an update

One of the areas of concern that The Amersham Society considers is the development of land and property within the locale with a view to preserving the historic conservation elements and commenting on redevelopment which may detract from the setting. Our view is seldom to dismiss any change entirely, but to help influence planning matters such that development enhances the appeal of living in or visiting Amersham.

In this article, Carol Chesney, the committee's new planning officer, gives us an update on three planning applications.

1 The Development of The Maltings, Old Amersham

One of the current planning applications submitted to the local council attracting much attention is the proposal for *“Listed building consent for change of use and redevelopment of site to provide 45 dwellings via two new detached buildings and conversion of existing buildings with some demolition, extensions, changes to doors and windows, internal alterations, refurbishment of four existing dwellings, with car parking, new landscaping and associated works.”*

Most of the contributor (public) comments acknowledge their support, in principle, to the development of this heritage asset in order to save it for future generations. By way of background, below are some extracts from the application to help understand the history and location of the property and the approach taken to consultation of neighbours. These are condensed for this purpose and would benefit from a full read of the statements available on the planning website.

Extracts from the Heritage Statement

“The Maltings were constructed from 1829 onwards by the Weller Brewery. The North and West Blocks, and the South and Central Blocks, are statutorily listed at Grade II (list entry nos. 1237995 and 1274379). Most of the other buildings on the site are considered to be within the curtilage of the listed buildings, and thus subject to listed building controls. Most of the Site lies within the Amersham Old Town Conservation Area.”

“Within 250m of the Site, there are 96 designated heritage assets; one Grade I listed building, six Grade II listed buildings, and 89 Grade II listed buildings. However, due to the topography of the area, existing urban development, and a lack of intervisibility between the Site and the identified assets, it is considered that there would be no impact on these assets, and they have been scoped out of this assessment.”*

Extracts from the Planning Proposal

“The site is located on the edge of Amersham old town, to the north of the High Street and the River Misbourne. Within the site there are several listed buildings of significant historic importance, and the site lies within the Amersham Old Town Conservation Area.

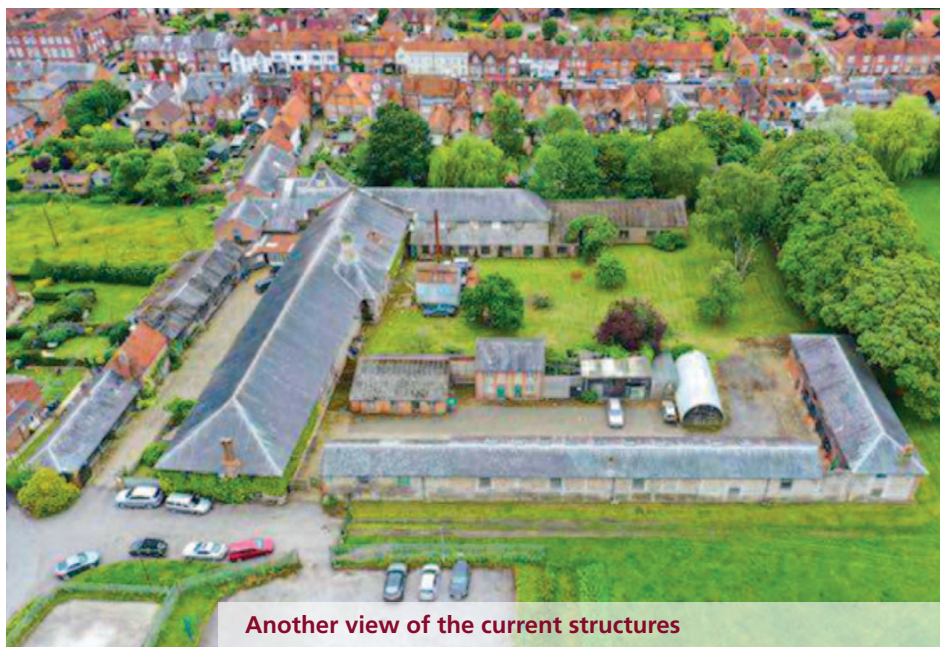
The site is bounded by the river to the south, Barn Meadow recreation ground to the west and north, and by predominantly two-storey residential areas to the remainder. There are several mature walnut trees along the western edge of the site and along part of the river boundary.

There are seventeen buildings on the site, mostly dating from the 19th Century with some later 20th Century additions. The majority of the buildings were workshops, stores and office premises in connection with the workshops, with some residential elements – all of the buildings are presently vacant.

The main access into the site is from Pondwicks, off School Lane – there are two pedestrian and vehicular entrances, one into the main body of the site and one into a mews-style collection of buildings to the eastern boundary. Access to the recreation ground runs along the northern boundary, which is identified as part of a footpath on the public rights of way map for Buckinghamshire, referenced AMS/56/1.



Overhead view of the site and its position in the Old Town



Another view of the current structures

The configuration of the existing building layout divides the site into three distinct external spaces, namely the Mews, a cobbled courtyard to the north and an open green space to the central area.”

Personally, I find the architectural elements of the proposals to be attractive and will leave it to the conservation officers to determine whether they are compatible with the historic buildings listing aided by the comments of contributors, many of whom have provided detailed narrative regarding apertures (existing and proposed) and external features.

The more general (non-exhaustive) observations that are worth highlighting are those that could impact residents and visitors to the Old Town but also Amersham in general.

Environmental concerns

The application contains much work related to the environmental impact of the proposals, but contributors are also seeking more specific information pertaining to certain matters.

The Maltings is adjacent to the Misbourne river which, combined with inadequate road drainage, has resulted in flooding in properties bordering the river (mostly the High Street) during periods of substantial rainfall. Those who could be impacted request further assurance that they will be no worse off.

Wildlife along the river and present in the, now vacant, Maltings buildings requires sufficient protection. Local residents have noted the habitats (notably owls and bats) that have either long existed or developed over time; habitats which the developers may not have identified as they are not resident.

● Overdevelopment

The proposals include construction of new buildings as well as redevelopment of the existing buildings (and demolition of parts) in order to create 45 dwellings and [78] parking spaces. Numerous contributors express concern regarding the adequacy of parking spaces and fear the overflow of vehicles onto the already stretched parking resource of the High Street and side streets.

A related concern exists regarding the number of new residents proposed in the Old Town and whether the resources for schooling and healthcare are able to cope.

● **Traffic**

A corollary of the above is the impact on local traffic particularly during peak periods; and this is after road users (local and commuters) have had to cope with the construction period as vehicular access to the property is already tight and it shares access routes with the primary school and the doctors' surgery. Provision of utilities may also cause repeated traffic disruption as evidenced by the construction of the McCarthy and Stone property in The Broadway.

● **Privacy and security**

Those with property adjacent to The Maltings will have, to varying degrees, a loss to the privacy they currently enjoy and there are concerns that they may have weakened security if The Maltings development increases access to boundaries and the development overlooks other properties in a manner that never existed when in commercial use.

● **Light/noise pollution**

Concerns regarding the level of light pollution the development will cause (parking area and that from dwellings) as well as the noise coming from, et al, installations of ground source heat pumps have been raised and are worthy of consideration.

● **Waste management**

Common bins stores are provided, but local residents have residual concerns about smells and vermin that may arise from these areas.

Finally, the developers have confirmed that no affordable housing is anticipated to be provided as part of this development.

It is always difficult to balance the economics of maintaining listed buildings, and it is clear that the community supports retention of The Maltings, but we only have one chance to voice any concerns, hence the number of contributor comments to date.

2 Aldi supermarket, 44 London Road West – still no decision.

The application of this much talked about development on the site of the old Jaguar garage on London Road West was submitted in May 2021. The Proposal is for the “*demolition of existing buildings and erection of a food store (Use class E) with servicing, access, car parking and landscaping.*” We have been in touch with the Chiltern and South Bucks Area Planning department, only to receive the following comment: “*As yet the decision on application PL/21/1309/FA has not been made.*” So, one and half years later, we are still none the wiser as to the outcome.

3 Agricultural Track - Appeal Decision

This was a seemingly innocuous planning application made in June 2021 which may have passed you by. The proposal was to build an agricultural track in the field between the A413 and Shardeloes Lake (PL/21/2316/FA). We briefly wrote about in last January’s newsletter saying your committee felt it important to express concerns regarding the impact it would have on the Shardeloes Grade II* 18th century registered park, the flora and fauna of the park, the visual impact itself and also the necessity for such a track. The application was refused in October 2021.

However an appeal was made against this decision but we’re relieved to report that Buckinghamshire Council has just dismissed (October 2022) the appeal citing it being an inappropriate development in the Green Belt, that it would harm the character, appearance and scenic qualities of this part of the AONB and that there is insufficient information to conclude there would be no adverse impact on biodiversity.

Carol Chesney

Rediscovering William Burges' Furniture

Our November talk was a rare treat: the subject was on the face of it rather niche as few of us knew anything at all about William Burges let alone his furniture but the promise of a talk by a hands-on craftsmen brought out a crowd of over fifty members – our biggest audience since we returned to the Kings Chapel after the hiatus of the pandemic.

Tom Lawrence started by introducing himself modestly as a furniture conservator and cabinetmaker. To understand his approach to the subject we needed get a picture of his background, and then he would go on to explain who Burges was, to describe his furniture and then to demonstrate how the furniture of William Burges has been gradually re-evaluated from the 2nd half of the 20th century.

Tom studied many years ago at Rycotewood College in Thame where he learned not only to design but also

how to make furniture. After college he started working in furniture conservation, first in Edinburgh and then in London where his workshop specialised in Chinese furniture.

Tom spent four years making bespoke furniture with Martin Grierson, a leading furniture maker and designer. Whilst working with Grierson, one

project for which Tom was in charge was the making of a magnificent table for the Bridewell institute. The table went on to win the Craft Guildmark of the year in 1996.



Having always liked history, Tom found conserving was highly satisfying work, with the bonus of his being able to use hand skills 90% of the time. As a conservator, the standard of work required is especially demanding as he tries to work to the same standard of the original maker and to employ the techniques that would have been used at the time. This is the only way to ensure a consistent result.

Working for over 14 years at Arlington Conservation had the greatest influence on Tom. Arlington had a good reputation, being the main restorers for Christies, many of the leading West End dealers in London, international collectors and many museums worldwide. He got to work on everything from Chippendale to Charles Rennie Mackintosh and C.F.A. Voysey, and on all ages of furniture



Table in mahogany designed by Thomas Hope c.1805 in the V&A Museum London.



Sir John Soane model stand c.1830.

from around the world. We were given an audio-visual tour of a Regency mahogany table by Thomas Hope on which Tom had worked on for the Victoria and Albert Museum and of the great model stand at the Sir John Soane Museum which had been greatly altered by an early curator of the museum and on which Tom had undertaken the work to return it to its original 1830s form.

The approach for conservation of furniture must always be to retain as much original surface and material as possible. This maintains the integrity of the piece. Where replacement is essential, Tom endeavours always to use correct techniques and materials – timbers are matched not just for species but for density and cut; when using adhesive to consolidate the original timber, to make sure glues chosen are reversible, rather than bonding breaks with epoxy resins which were unknown when the pieces were originally made.

In 2017 Arlington closed its doors for the last time, and Tom seized the opportunity to embark on an MA in Art Market Appraisals at Kingston University, with a view to expanding new career options on graduation. As part of that course he researched and wrote a dissertation entitled *"Visionaries for Quality - what influences have helped promote the decorative arts market for High Victorian design, with particular regard for William Burges"* and it was his research on William Burges that he had come to share with the members of the Amersham Society. *"I had conserved a number of Burges's pieces"* Tom explained, *"Also, I could approach a number of antique dealers that had dealt with his artefacts, and I would enjoy the research and it would be useful in the future."*

The long 19th century remains very influential on how we live today, especially its legacy of produced goods. It was a period of contrasts from the advances in taste and craftsmanship in the work of A.W.N. Pugin, William Morris and John Ruskin, to the Great Exhibition of 1851 which promoted Britain's technological expertise, where taste was not at the forefront of manufacture. Religion and philosophy informed British society greatly, and gave rise to a very ordered culture within the arts. Most high Victorian architects and designers were scholarly, taking their art very seriously.



Castell Coch, South Glamorgan, Wales c.1875.

In 1876 William Burges wrote: *"I was brought up in the 13th century belief, and in that belief I intend to die"*. Burges was born in 1827 and died in 1881, he was imbued with the multi-layered historicism of the 19th century. His father was a wealthy civil engineer and engineer to the Bute docks in Cardiff. It was through this connection that William was introduced to his greatest patron, the young third Marquis of Bute, then the richest man in Britain.



Cardiff Castle Clock Tower, 1870 – 1873.

William now had the means to travel extensively, experiencing many styles, peoples and materials, all of which informed his taste and expression. He was engaged as architect in the late 1860s by the Marquis of Bute to redesign a medieval ruin he had inherited in 1848 Castell Coch *"as a country residence for occasional occupation in the summer"*.



Corner of Bed in Castell Coch, c.1890, John Starling Chapple. Made after Burges' death.

We looked at picture of what Tom called *"a typical inspired piece"* in Castell Coch in Wales – the J.S. Chapple bed - designed in the style of Burges and made by John Starling Chapple in 1890. Chapple designed many pieces after Burges's death in 1881 for both Castell Coch and Cardiff Castle.

The Clock Tower at Cardiff castle is contemporary with Castell Coch, also indulging both Burges and the 3rd Marquis of Bute's love and interpretation of medieval architecture. Bute had engaged Burges to remodel and transform the building into the gothic fantasy we see today.



A corbel in The Summer Smoking room Cardiff Castle c.1872.

We looked at the Summer Smoking Room, one of Burges' most opulent rooms in the castle, with influences from Gothic, Arabic and Norse cultures.



An Ebonised Fire screen with Two Wings and Glass Panels 1871.
Sold for £5.5 lot: 28 17th June 1949.
Sold to Cardiff Castle for £17,000 2012.

It was in the Summer Smoking Room that an ebonised fire screen originally resided until Cardiff City Council held a sale on 17th June 1949. Tom restored the fire screen in 2011. The 1949 sale consisted of 60 lots, about 24 definitely designed by Burges. A total of 57 lots were sold. Cardiff Council had been bequeathed the castle by the 4th Marquis of Bute in 1947, and like many corporations after the war it was short of money. The prices realised were extremely low, partly due to austerity, but more importantly because the furniture was valued only for its function and was thought to be of little artistic merit and certainly not in popular taste. It was thanks to the research of Matthew Williams, the former curator at Cardiff Castle, that the post-war sale could be properly appreciated. Tom illustrated some of the items in the sale which had since been bought back and were now re-patriated to their original location,

and went on to give the astonishing differences between the prices at which they had been sold in the 1940s and the sums required to secure their return.

It was clear from the increase in prices realised that the importance of the works of Burges had been re-evaluated, but it was not straightforward to analyse the cultural significance of furniture. Tom suggested using the method used by cultural



Teak bed 1871 sold 1949 for £7,10s.
Sold Christies 3rd November 1999 for £133,000.



An Ebonised table 1871-1873 sold for £2,2s in 1949. Sold for £30,000 in 2007 now in Cardiff Castle.

heritage boards where experts use the Waverley Criteria to determine whether a work of art is deemed as important Cultural Heritage and should remain in the UK. If the item is closely connected with our history and national life, if it is of outstanding aesthetic importance or if it is of outstanding significance for the study of some branch of art, learning or history then it should be considered for an export ban and if any two of those criteria are met the bar should be put in place.

Tulip vases: although not furniture, they clearly illustrate how values can change both monetarily and culturally.



Tulip vase 1874 from Summer Smoking room Cardiff Castle one of two. Sold in 1961 for £22. Sold in 2016 for £388,000. One in The National Museum of Wales, Cardiff and one in the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.



Tower House, Melbury Road, Kensington, London.

We turned next to Tower House, William Burges's own house built 1875 – 1878. Here he could design everything and let his imagination free. He only enjoyed it finished for three years before his death in 1881. In 1885 Burges's brother-in-law and architect, Richard Popplewell Pullan produced two volumes of photographs of Tower House. These two volumes are now housed in the National Art Library at the V&A, and offer a unique record of Tower House's contents untouched following the death of Burges.

Some fifty years later, the contents were offered for sale at auction by Chestertons on 16th October 1933. The sale, like that at Cardiff later, released the very rare productions of William Burges onto the art market. Also, as with Cardiff, the prices were very low, and many lots went unsold.



The Narcissus Washstand in Tower House
c.1865-67. [RP Pullan 1885].

As a comparison we viewed three images of the Narcissus Washstand. As Lot 109 in the 1933 sale, they were purported to have been bought by Sir John Betjeman, later in Lincoln, then given to Evelyn Waugh. Waugh wrote about the washstand in his book 'The ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold' in which the washstand is haunted!

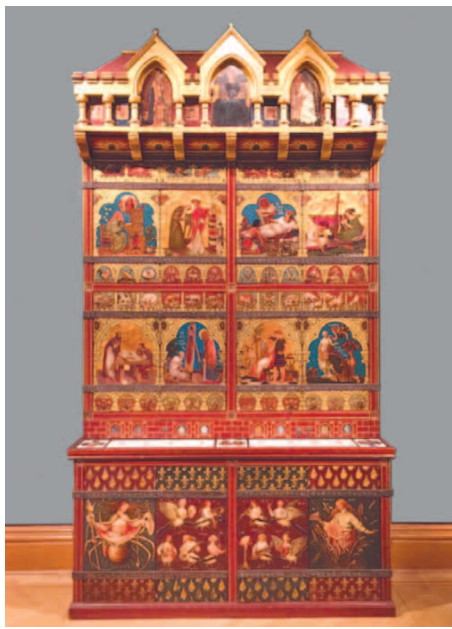
In the photograph taken in 1885 the numerous objects placed upon the washstand gave the viewer a taste of how many unique items William Burges had in his house. Being an antiquarian and Gothicism he would re-purpose Chinese vases with ornate mounts or Indian Mughal vessels with silver bands and semi-precious stones that elevate these artefacts to masterpieces.

The Great Bookcase 1859 – 1862.

Lot 117 of the Tower House sale in 1933, the Great Bookcase sold for £50 to the Ashmolean museum Oxford, bought by the Ashmolean's deputy curator Kenneth Clark [of "Civilisation" fame]. In today's value £50 is worth £3,500, but the piece is now valued in excess of £2 million. Kenneth Clark's motives were that the bookcase is an important art work being painted by 14 different artists associated with the Pre-Raphaelite movement. Kenneth Clark is quoted as saying: 'The bookcase is not acceptable to present taste. It will always remain an important document in the history of the Pre-Raphaelite movement'.



In the Higgins Museum Bedford,
sold by Evelyn Waugh in 1994 for £240,435.



The Great Bookcase
1859 – 1862
lot: 117 sold £50
today worth in excess
of £2 million.

In conclusion, Tom reminded us of how William Burges' decorative arts, particularly his furniture, demonstrates how taste and value changes. From production being unique and exclusive in the 19th century, to junk shop in the first half of the 20th Century, now elevated to cultural heritage and sought after by museums not only in Britain but around the world.

His limited output is collected by highly creative individuals and can have an almost mystical aura. Above all, everything he designed was with scholarly thought and made to the highest quality.

The talk was followed with a lively round of questions from members delighted by many of the small details Tom had touched on. A passing mention of a rare £142,000 Chinese chair Tom had worked on in his early

conservation career was brought up by one member of the audience, incredulous at how anyone could have the nerve to take apart and re-glue a chair that would then go on to sell for £6 million, another asked about how the glass spheres on a medieval bedstead were made. More anecdotes of Tower House also emerged, as it transpired that this is the home now of Jimmy Page the guitarist with Led Zeppelin, an avid Burges collector, in a house so fragile that he will only ever play acoustic guitar at home, reserving the electric guitars for studio and stage.

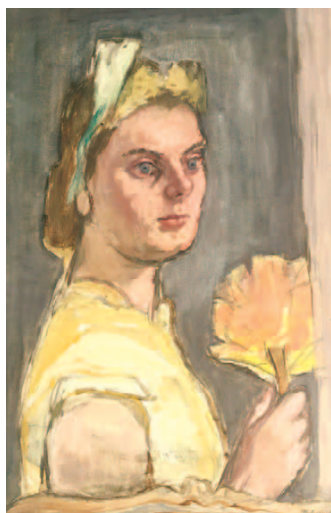
Dorothy Symes thanked Tom for such a fascinating and meticulously prepared talk, the first he had ever given, for which Tom received a further round of applause.

Edward Copisarow

"A New View" at Amersham Museum

In autumn 2022, with the support of the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust, we began work on the creation of a dedicated, temporary exhibition space. The new exhibition space will showcase work made by contemporary and historic artists and craftspeople, both from the museum's collection as well as works loaned from other museums and private collections. There will be a changing exhibition programme, with a particular focus on works that have not been seen before or made by people whose work has been overlooked or underrepresented.

The inaugural exhibition, in spring 2024, will focus on the Vienna-born artist Marie-Louise von Motesiczky (1906 – 1996), whom the gallery will be named after. Marie-Louise came to Amersham with her mother after arriving in Britain in 1939, to escape persecution in Austria. The museum holds five paintings by Marie-Louise in the collection and plans to show more of her work in the exhibition. Although the exact details are to be decided, we're keen to highlight Marie-Louise's experience as an émigré in Britain and the community of people from Europe with whom she developed relationships during her time in Amersham, including the future Nobel prize-winning author Elias Canetti (1905 – 1994), and the composer, pianist and teacher Francesco Tucciat (1893 – 1949). We hope to include extracts from her extensive archive of letters and photographs, which were recently deposited at the Tate. The exhibition



Dorothy by
Marie-Louise von
Motesiczky

could tie in with a programme of activities for national Refugee Week in June, which would include a focus on other émigré artists who spent time in Amersham, including the Jewish, Russian-born photographer Laeila Goehr (1908 – 2002).



We have lots of ideas about possible future exhibition topics, including a more in-depth focus on traditional crafts. We have a relatively large collection of lace and lace-making tools, only some of which are on display in the museum. Lace-making was not just common in Amersham, but in other Chiltern and Bedfordshire towns, so there is scope for bringing together collections from across the area in our new space. In line with our commitment to interpret objects from a new perspective, we would look beyond the lace itself and consider the women and children who made it. Their individual achievements are largely anonymous, despite their creations being highly skilled works of art. In all our exhibitions we hope to draw parallels with contemporary life. For lace this could be celebratory, with a focus on contemporary lace artists. Or it could be an opportunity to consider ongoing social issues, such as child labour or living in poverty.

Photographs make up the largest element of the museum's collection and whilst we often use a selection of historic images to illustrate a theme, we have rarely made them the central focus of an exhibition. Perhaps the most significant collection is the museum's 800 glass plate negatives, created by local resident George Ward (1860 – 1943). His photographs date from 1880 to 1935 and range from commissioned, portrait photography, to images of notable local events – coronation day, the unveiling of the First World War memorial, the Amersham marathon – and the recording of everyday life, with people in and outside their shops and homes or playing in the street. Many of the people in the images are identifiable, providing a platform to tell their stories too. Such a large collection also affords opportunities to commission contemporary images of shopkeepers, residents and events in our community today.



George Ward's
portrait of
Miss Toovey,
1895



A dedicated, temporary exhibition gallery gives us room to tell a detailed story in greater depth. We have several extraordinary collections of social history items that relate to one person, family or business. We don't have space in the museum's permanent displays to show a complete collection, so making one the focus of a temporary exhibition would provide a detailed insight into domestic and working life and a glimpse into the relationships, issues

and challenges everyday people encountered at a particular point in the past. Many of the objects in these collections are both beautiful and functional, providing a chance to compare owning fewer, hand-crafted objects in the past with our mass consumption today.

The new gallery will also enable us to better support local, creative practitioners and to participate in Bucks Arts Weeks and other county-wide

initiatives. This could include works made by visitors, with the support of an artist. Part of the project is to create a community learning programme, that enables people to make their own responses to the works on display, resulting in new creative outputs, to be shared with others. Through this programme we hope to work specifically with families, young people and older people, particularly those who haven't visited the museum before. We will also re-develop our young curators programme, resulting in an accredited scheme for teenagers, providing a comprehensive insight into documenting and caring for a collection and developing and staging exhibitions.

A New Welcome

Through the project the museum is also creating a new introductory space, which visitors will experience on arrival at the museum. This is a direct result of the creation of the gallery; the existing introductory space will become the new temporary exhibition gallery and the new introductory space will move to the Woodcock Room upstairs.

The introduction display will include a timeline, featuring people, places and events, alongside objects from the museum's collection that tell the story of the local area. The timeline will be co-curated with local people, including community partners,

members of the museum's children's art club, our young curators and reminiscence groups.

Share Your Views

We are delighted that Emily Toettcher, the museum's previous director, is working as our project manager over the next two years. The project is being led by a small working group consisting of two museum trustees, Emily, and Briony, as current museum director, and we are assembling a larger steering group to enable us to work with representatives from both existing and potential new audiences, as well as making connections with other cultural organisations in the county.

We are also committed to working with local people to develop the exhibition programme, as well as the new timeline in the Woodcock Room. Perhaps you have an idea for an exhibition, or would be interested in research for the timeline? Please do get in touch to share your thoughts or come along to a session at the museum to find out more on either Thursday 9th February 2023 at 2pm, or Monday 20th February at 6:30pm. Please RSVP to emily@amershammuseum.org if you would like to join us, or have ideas or feedback that you would like to share.

Briony Hudson

NOTICEBOARD

Programme of Talks and Events

Coffee / tea is served from 7.30pm, talks start at 8.00pm
and take place in the Kings Chapel.

Thursday 26th January

William Hakewill MP

Close colleague of John Hampden and inventor of Kindle ?
A talk by Sam Hearn of the Hampden Society.

Monday 20th February

The World of the Honey Bee

A talk by Howard Pool.

Tuesday 28th March

Liberty : The Bucks Man, the London Shop, the Global Style

A talk by Will Phillips of Buckinghamshire Museum.

Wednesday 26th April

Buckinghamshire Spies and Subversives

A talk by Denise Beddows.

Amersham Society Officers

Chair

Edward Copisarow

07932 152522

Vice Chair and Newsletter Editor

John Catton

01494 726616

Hon. Secretary and Annual Programme

Geraldine Marshall-Andrew

01494 433735

Annual Programme

Dorothy Symes

01494 434858

Website <https://amershamsociety.org>

General Enquiries: please email info@amershamsociety.org