

Chairman's Report – AGM, 25 October 2023

New Committee members

Following last year's "Have Your Say" online survey, three additional members joined your Committee: Carol Chesney has taken on the brief for reviewing local planning applications from George Allison; John Catton has been elected Vice-Chairman and has taken on editing the Society's newsletter from Dorothy Symes; and David Cash has taken on a new role seeking to develop relationships with Amersham on the Hill and its residents. They are all very welcome additions to the team of 6 who have been working closely together for the last few years.

Our events programme

It has been another busy year for the Society. The programme of monthly talks at the Kings Chapel running from January to May and September to November was, as ever, complemented by a summer outing and a summer party. Many thanks indeed to the Kings Chapel for accommodating us without charge for room hire, to Su and Quentin Chases for again allowing us to hold a summer party in their garden at Little Shardeloes and most of all to our 3-strong events committee of Dorothy Symes, Geraldine Marshall-Andrew and Yvonne Suckling for organising all this. Attendance at events has continued to rise thanks to the varied programme and also in no small part to the helpful email reminders sent out by our web manager Lena Morgan. We have been fortunate in securing a member of the audience to write-up for the newsletter each of our monthly talks, and it is hoped that those who cannot commit to volunteering regularly will continue offering themselves for this one-off task as the opportunities arise. The events team has the programme for the whole of 2024 already sorted, apart from the outing and the charity speaker, but Dorothy is keen to retire from leading this group during 2024. If you would be interested in joining the events team, helping to identify potential speakers and organising activities, do please make yourself known to any member of the Committee.

Society membership

Membership renewals remained extremely healthy and the number of new members we have welcomed has largely compensated for those we have lost, so that our current membership stands at 363 compared to 366 a year ago. Many thanks to Peter Borrows our membership secretary for his very efficient work on this and his management of our team of volunteers who deliver the newsletter by hand wherever possible.

Heritage projects

Peter is also the lead on our current heritage project which aims to use the residue of the Dulcie Denison legacy, plus other donations, to erect at least two display boards along the River Misbourne, explaining the rarity of chalk streams, their geology and ecology, emphasising the need for conserving them and referring to the history of the river at different points along its bank. The boards will be well-illustrated with examples of flora and fauna likely to be seen at that point. He is supported in this by Graham Cooke, Marieke Bosman and Adrian Porter and we are very grateful to all three for the energy they have put in on this.

The Amersham Society continues to support Amersham Museum which we set up when we were founded back in the 1950s. The Museum goes from strength to strength and this year we were pleased to fund their acquisition of a photo album of The Colenso Family of Elangeni House, on the plot where Elangeni School now stands, and from which it took its name. Members will have read about the album in the September 2023 newsletter.

Planning matters

Carol Chesney has been monitoring all of the planning, listed buildings and licensing applications made to Bucks Council in respect of the Old Town and the immediate surrounding area and has

made representations on behalf of the Society where the Committee has felt the proposals were inappropriate. The most significant time has been devoted to consideration of the development of The Maltings for residential use, and both Carol and George Allison are to be thanked for the work that they have put in on this. There is general community support for turning these important listed buildings into new homes, but the details of the proposed drainage, traffic management solutions and parking provision are still of concern and your Committee has been dealing with both developer and Bucks Council to try to get these concerns addressed. After more than a decade on the Committee, including a spell as acting Chair, George will be retiring at the AGM and we shall miss his diligence and warm personality very much indeed.

Newsletter

After 4 years of editing the January, May and September newsletters Dorothy has passed the baton to John Catton who has introduced annual themes alongside the regular reports on monthly meetings and the news from the Museum. This year, the topic was "Music making in Amersham": Jan featured Amchor, May showcased Amersham Band and Amersham A Cappella and September reported on Amersham Concert Club. Other featured local organisations included Amersham Bird Club and Amersham Photographic Society, and the two schools celebrating significant anniversaries: St. Mary's (150th) and Elangeni (50th). In addition to thanking Dorothy for her amazing 4 years, and congratulating John on such a great start, thanks must also go to Lena Morgan for her photographs and proof reading, Briony Hudson and Alison Bailey for their regular articles and Danny Robins, our graphic designer who has worked so closely with Dorothy and now John to transform our newsletter to a quality so high that it is generating spontaneous complimentary feedback. The theme for 2024 will be "Nature in and around Amersham". If any member would like to contribute an article or suggest a local organisation to be featured, please get in touch with John.

Website

Thanks to Lena Morgan's pro-active management of our online presence, our website remains very current, providing up-to-date information about the Society's activities alongside access to its previous publications and video recordings archive. Additionally, to contact our members directly we use the website to issue regular e-alerts. We have also promoted some non-commercial events in the area over the last year and publish news on local matters outside of the Society. This year we followed three major developments in the Old Town - resurfacing of the High Street, the River Misbourne Restoration Project and drainage works on the High Street.

Community liaison

David Cash has been putting some shape onto the new "Top Amersham" brief. A significant proportion of the Society's current membership lives in Amersham on the Hill and Chesham Bois, and the Committee is keen that this be reflected in our work. The Society's March 2024 talk will be given in the Large Barn adjacent to the Lifestyle Centre and members of the Amersham and District Residents Association and Chiltern U3A will be welcomed. David is also liaising with the Bucks Council Community Board for Amersham and the villages on their plans for a charities and volunteering fair in Amersham on the Hill, organised in conjunction with Community Impact Bucks.

The heart of the matter...

Final mentions must go to our administrative backbone comprising our secretary Geraldine Marshall-Andrew and our treasurer John Morgan. Geraldine organises our Committee meetings every two months, keeps our agenda manageable and minutes all our action points, and John keeps our books, and deals with the bank, our insurers and the Charity Commission.

Edward Copisarow