An impressionistic painting of a landscape. In the foreground, a wooden boat is partially visible. The middle ground is dominated by a large, dense green bush or tree. A small red bird is perched on a branch. In the background, tall, dark cypress trees stand against a hazy, yellowish sky. The overall style is soft and painterly.

**MAY 2024**

**AMERSHAM SOCIETY**  
FOUNDED IN 1956  
**NEWSLETTER**





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Cover photograph: **Deckchair**, one of Marie-Louise Motesiczky's paintings on view at Amersham museum until 26th August.

© Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust 2024.

Photograph opposite: by George Ward. *"Sheep in the High Street, Whit Monday cattle fare, 1905"*. Courtesy Amersham museum – May 2024 calendar.

# Editorial

Welcome to another newsletter with, as always, an eclectic mix of articles by local residents writing about topics of historical, social and contemporary interest.

The Society has a long standing involvement with Amersham Museum so it is appropriate for us to welcome their new Chair of Trustees, Martin Day, and thank his predecessor, Gary Gotch, who is retiring after 18 years on the Board.

Martin has wide leadership experience. Following a career in banking and education, he is currently Chair of Danes Educational Trust, a twelve school multi-academy trust. His other roles include Board member at the Association of Business Executives, an international provider of professional qualifications, and at the Institute of Contemporary Music, a 'rock school' which offers degrees for the music industry. He has also been a member of national committees regulating the higher education sector.

As well as structured organisations here in Amersham there are the occasional ad hoc groups, such as the Community Clean-up Days. The last was in March, when volunteers met at the Memorial Gardens and St. Michael's Church and sadly collected some 40 bags of litter.

Another sign of the times is that all organisations – including charities like the Amersham Society – are expected to have policies in place describing how they manage their affairs and comply with legal requirements. With that in mind, the Society's Committee has agreed an

Equal Opportunities Policy. This recognises that society in general consists of many diverse groups and individuals and that they are sometimes discriminated against. The Policy clearly states that the Amersham Society is opposed to any form of discrimination and that it will work to ensure that all its services are provided in a way that promotes the rights and needs of people from minority groups. A copy of the full Policy can be viewed on the Society's website.

There was one article in January's newsletter which asked for a response from our members and two others which have, unasked for, elicited responses.

We asked if anybody recognised the (unsightly) retaining concrete wall by the Misbourne in Pondwicks. Nobody has responded, thus we are no further forward in understanding why or when it was built.

In another article Alison Bailey delved into the origin of Copperkins, as in Copperkins Lane. Nick Gammage has also been carrying out some research and gives us an alternative explanation in an article on page 26.

Finally, following his article on HS2, Keith Hoffmeister has written to give us an update on the sinkholes. He wrote: the first one at Shardeloes was back filled using chalk excavated previously from the Little Missenden vent shaft. Last November, as the first giant Tunnel Boring Machines (TBM) passed 18 metres below a footpath alongside Hedgemoor Wood, Hyde End, ground movement was observed and another sink hole appeared. Remedial works were carried out and the footpath reopened within six weeks. The good news is that the ground subsidence occurred 25 metres above ground water level and should not have any effect on the aquifer.

Then, as the first of the TBMs approached South Heath just south of the tunnel portal, two new holes were discovered just south of Frith Hill. Remedial work should have been completed by the time you read this.

As a post script, the TBMs broke through at the tunnel's northern portal near Great Missenden in February and March, completing their ten-mile journey that began near Maple Cross in June 2021.

The headhouse for the Amersham vent shaft is now under construction. You can quite clearly see its circular shape as opposed to the rectangular profile of the others.

Ideas for articles for newsletters come from a variety of sources: suggestions from our members, those commemorating anniversaries, reports on our talks, but one in this issue came to me when I was attending the Community carol service just before Christmas. During the service Elizabeth Shepherd told us that this year's Mayoral charity would be Chiltern Foodbank. This was followed by an impassioned talk by the Foodbank's CEO, Diane Rutter. It was a hard listen about something which lies hidden beneath the veneer that is Amersham. I immediately asked Diane to write an article for our newsletter – see page 33.

It's disappointing to report that, due to work commitments, our Planning Officer Carol Chesney is reluctantly stepping down. She has though very kindly agreed to stay on until a successor can be found. We really have to thank Carol for the work she has put in behind the scenes. You'll find her article about the Aldi development in the Old Town on page 40. If you have a keen interest in keeping an eye on future developments in the Old Town, please do come and join us. Simply contact our Secretary, Geraldine Marshall-Andrew.

I've always wondered why our planning system was so slow. With Carol's article in mind, does a recent experience (partly) explain this? I was due to attend a planning meeting on behalf of the Amersham Society on 2nd April, where the Aldi development was due to be debated. It was cancelled just five days before with no future date given.

Lastly, but by no means least, I have to correct a photo credit from January's issue. So, with apologies to **Roly Gross**, a member of the Amersham Photographic Society; thank you for allowing us to use your atmospheric "winter scene of Parsonage Woods" picture. Not only is it an evocative picture but it could be, bearing in mind climate change, an historic image as we don't see much snow in Amersham any more.





# Amazon Adventure

OUR SPEAKER LAST NOVEMBER was Dr. Jill Eyers. Her background is geology and archaeology. During her career she has lectured at several universities, carried out field work around the world, written numerous books and set up her own business, “Chiltern Archaeology.” However the genesis of her talk did not draw on these experiences, but from a childhood dream...

...though in growing up, going to university, forging a career, getting married, having children, the dream of visiting the Amazon, named after the female warriors of Greek mythology, had all but disappeared. Until, that is, work took her to Brazil, where the Amazon actually is! Getting to and experiencing the river and rain forest, once her paid assignment was complete, would take time, adding an extra 2/3 weeks to her trip...and she even persuaded her scientific colleagues to join her.



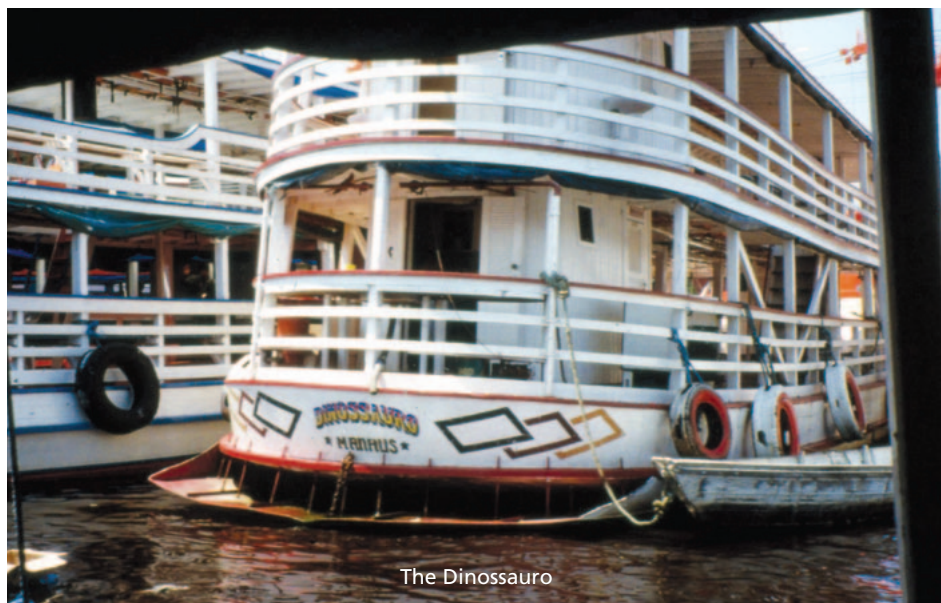
Jill started with some background statistics. The Amazon is the largest river in the world; over 4,000 miles long with more than 1,000 tributaries, meandering through a vast broadleaved forested flood plain covering 2.7 million sq. miles absorbing three meters of rainfall each year. This means it accounts for 16% of all fresh river water worldwide. Today it flows eastward into the Atlantic Ocean, but 80 million years ago it drained into the Pacific Ocean. What happened? 25 million years ago with a shift in tectonic plates the Andes was created forcing its source in Peru, just 100 miles from the pacific, upwards so reversing the direction of flow.

Help to explore this giant ecosystem was obviously needed, so they engaged a guide – along with the

only feasible means of transport, a substantial boat (the perfectly named “*Dinossauro*”), complete with sleeping accommodation. It came with a skipper and his wife (an excellent cook), all for the equivalent of £6 per day per person!

As they hadn’t a clue as to the food they were eating apart from the fact it was fruit or fish from local markets, they left the menus to the captain’s wife. One of her colleagues was horrified to note that a fish found in one market had not been recorded by science and there were happily eating it!

What was not to like, even the snakes and spiders and leeches (which dropped unnoticed off the trees), along with the 40°C heat and near 100% humidity, could not spoil this geological paradise.



The Dinossauro

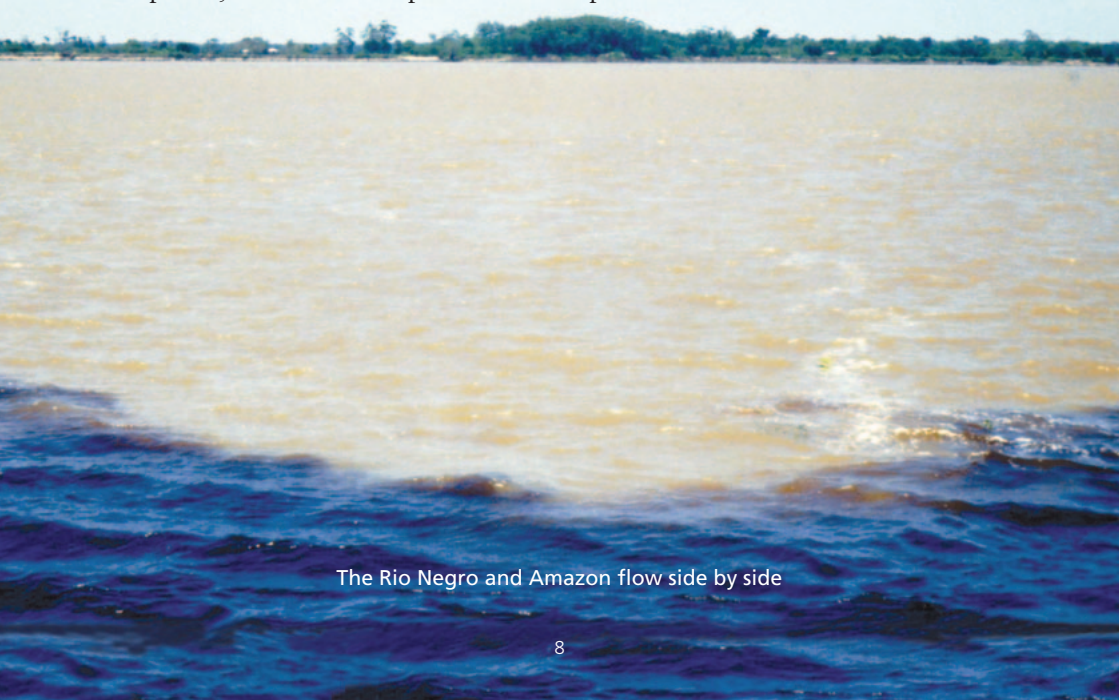
To the scientific mind the trip provided endless lines of enquiry across a range of disciplines. For instance the Rio Negro, its largest tributary, has near black waters, whilst the waters of the Amazon itself are a pale sandy colour. At their confluence these two waters don't amalgamate, but flow side by side for about four miles as distinct channels before mixing. Jill explained that this was down to the fact that the two rivers flowed over different terrains, were of different temperatures, had different flow rates and picked up distinctly different types of dissolved sediment.

Another example was the sheer variety of fauna they saw - or perhaps didn't see, as it was hidden by the dense forest and understandably wary of humans. Take for instance the 500 mammals, 1,500 species of birds, 2,000 fish species, the 30 million species of

insect (including 200 species of mosquitoes) and 7,500 butterflies (this compares with just 59 species here in the UK). Plus a dawn chorus of frogs, many poisonous and masters of camouflage.

By no means a definitive list and, to a consternation of the party, many species will become extinct before scientists have even recorded them.

Just how does the sheer profusion of life in the Amazon, not just survive, but co-exist? Tiering, on many levels and sub-levels was Jill's explanation. There are animal species living at ground level, others in the low shrub and finally those in the high tree canopy. Layer on top of that the nocturnal feeders, the diurnal feeders and a third, crepuscular, group, overlapping the day and night feeders. They saw sloths who, apparently, as well as walking upside-down, give birth upside-down!



The Rio Negro and Amazon flow side by side

Another statistic: 40,000 species of plant grow there. The soil is nutrient poor, so how do they thrive? The deciduous trees produce vast quantities of leaf litter which is rotted down by indispensable insects and mycelia producing the nutrients which enable plants to flourish. Jill confirmed that there are vines strong enough that would have allowed Tarzan to swing through the jungle with ease! Some plants don't need soil, the epiphytes; they cling to trees getting sufficient nutrients from the moist air and rain, as do the lichens and some of the mosses. The flooded plains provide yet another tier for plant survival.

A sad, yet uplifting part of Jill's talk concerned the indigenous people who still call the Amazon their home. Just 5% of the original population survives made up of more than 60 different ethnic groups who, against the odds, retain their isolated existence. It was the Spanish and Portuguese who first invaded looking for fabled treasures and, aside from the killings, brought illnesses which the natives could not combat. Regrettably the invaders haven't gone away; today they are the loggers and farmers (followed by the road builders and fortune seeking open-cast miners) who are destroying their habitat, their sole means of survival. So, understandably, they are terrified of foreigners, indeed Jill spoke



The loggers and farmers destroying their habitat

of sailing past groups of huts, clearly inhabited (smoke drifting up from fires), but nobody around - they had retreated into the jungle.

Until one day they passed a village where, as usual, all the inhabitants had gone into hiding....except for one small girl who was fishing. Jill learned that the piranha may not be as fearsome as its reputation - it will only attack if there is blood in the water - but it is not worth catching as it's very bony with little flesh. The locals have a varied diet, fish obviously, but also fruits and nuts. And they drink the juices of fruits; one surprising one was cashew juice, the most wonderful fruit juice Jill has ever tasted ..... sadly not stocked by Waitrose!

**Dr Jill Eyers**



# The Journey to Chalgrove Field

A talk by Mike Payne

## Standfirst

*Princes Risborough historian Mike Payne's fascination with English battlefields was sparked by a poignant visit to the site of Flodden Field near the Scottish border. That interest eventually led him to the field at Chalgrove where, during the English Civil War, the great Buckinghamshire Parliamentarian John Hampden – 'The Patriot' – was fatally wounded. A full house listened enthralled as Mike conjured up a vivid picture of the Chalgrove Field battle and the stories behind it.*

The battlefield at Chalgrove



Mike recalled how three journeys lay behind his deep interest in English battlefields, the English Civil War, and the Battle of Chalgrove Field (1643) where John Hampden of Great Hampden and cousin of Oliver Cromwell was fatally wounded.

The first journey led to an eerie moment when, during a tour of the Scottish Borders, Mike took an unplanned visit to the site of the battle of Flodden Field (1513). He felt the hairs on the back of his neck rise at a distinct feeling that he had been on that battlefield before. He bought a book on battlefields in a Melrose bookshop - printed, uncannily, in his adopted home town of Princes Risborough- and he was hooked. His adventures exploring the most iconic battles in English History had begun.

The second journey was the one which lay at the heart of the intriguing story behind the battle (more of a skirmish than a battle) which took place early on the morning of 18th June 1643 between Royalist and Parliamentary forces near the South Oxfordshire village of Chalgrove, between Watlington and Oxford.

Chalgrove Field is now best known as the conflict in which Parliamentary leader Colonel John Hampden (1595 – 1643) of Hampden House received the wound from which he died six days later which so desperately demoralised the Parliamentary forces. But behind that battle were remarkable if far less well-known stories of treason and a journey to find a great treasure horde.

The Parliamentary forces, billeted at Thame, were suffering from low morale: they had not been paid for some time, disease was rife and they were exhausted and restless. After the defeat at the Battle of Reading, King Charles had retreated to Christ Church College Oxford with his Royalist troops led by his nephew the gifted general Prince Rupert.

Rupert was the son of King's Charles's sister Elizabeth Stuart whose brief reign as Queen of Bohemia led her to be known as "*the Winter Queen*."



John Hampden

Charles and Rupert learned from a Parliamentarian turncoat John Urry that a pay wagon carrying around £21,000 (£1.8m in today's money) was on its way to Thame to pay the troops. Preventing that payload reaching Thame would further hit morale and would be some measure of revenge for the defeat at Reading.

Prince Rupert mustered a force of around 1,800 troops comprising cavalry, infantry and dragoons to intercept the wagon.

And so that second journey began.

Prince Rupert set out with his force on the evening of 17th June 1643 to find the wagon. He crossed the River Thame at Chiselhampton Bridge, passed through Tetsworth and plundered the Parliamentarian outposts at Postcombe and Chinnor.

News of Rupert's sortie reached the Parliamentarian commanders, including John Hampden who was at Watlington. Underestimating the Cavalier strength, they set off with a small force to intercept Prince Rupert. The two sides clashed at around 9 a.m. on the morning of 18th June in a field near Chalgrove, below the Chinnor Hills.

The Parliamentarians were routed, Hampden was mortally wounded, and the Cavalier force returned safely to Oxford across Chiselhampton Bridge.

The cause of Hampden's fatal wound remained a mystery: the old story is that Hampden was injured when his gun backfired, but this version was vehemently disputed by the John Hampden Society who championed the more prosaic explanation that he was the victim of a Cavalier musket ball.

Hampden's wound did not at first appear to be life-threatening. He was able to ride away and was taken under cover to a house in High Street, Thame, on the site of the Greyhound Inn. A plaque in the alley running off the High Street marks the place he stayed and it is still possible to see timbers from the inner wall of the original building.

His wound may have become infected because six days later "*The Patriot*" died. He was buried in Great Hampden Church, next to his ancestral seat of Hampden House.

Although there were few casualties at Chalgrove Field (Mike described it as "*more of a skirmish than a battle*") Hampden's death gave it enormous and portentous significance.



The stone bridge at Chiselhampton



The memorial, just off the B480

There remained a mystery, too, about what became of the Parliamentary pay wagon. Prince Rupert never found it and by all accounts it never reached those unpaid troops in Thame.

Mike's theory was that, knowing that Royalists were on his trail, the waggoner may well have taken refuge in the Chinnor Hills and the wagon may still be there in the undergrowth with its treasure intact.

The life of a Parliamentary soldier: wounds treated without anaesthetic, poor food, poor pay, and disease rife.

The third and final journey was one he made retracing Prince Rupert's journey with his Cavalier force. He shared photographs and a video of that journey: the site of the battle marked by a memorial, just off the B480; the field where the battle took place now lying behind a hedgerow which made it difficult to see from the road; the wide and strong-running River Thame at Chiselhampton showing clearly just why

the village's medieval stone bridge was so critical in allowing travellers to cross the river safely.

One of the most fascinating elements of his research into Chalgrove Field had been a growing admiration and appreciation of the Royalist Commander Prince Rupert: not just an outstanding statesman, military strategist, and soldier, but also a highly educated and sophisticated artist and lover of the arts.

That interest, he said, had been fuelled by reading Charles, Earl Spencer's well-researched biography *Prince Rupert: Last Cavalier* which he recommended to anyone wanting to find out more about this remarkable 17th Century figure. He had written to Earl Spencer praising his book and he shared a copy of the Earl's reply.

The talk generated a number of questions from members, clearly engrossed by this harrowing and little-understood period of civil strife.

**Nick Gammage**



# Wild Amersham

## A (short) natural history

*'Nature is not a place to visit. It is home'.* **Gary Snyder**

When I first made Amersham home I was enchanted by its nature. To walk from my front door into a lovely beech wood, through green fields or across a burbling chalk river was just magical. Yet, over time, I realised that Amersham was not quite as green as I imagined. Like much of the UK, healthy, wild habitats are rare, even in Amersham. Much of our local land is covered by busy roads and sprawling buildings. Those green fields are not nature but monoculture farmland sprayed with pesticides and herbicides. Most of our parks, sports fields, road verges and private gardens are mown and tidied so much that wildlife struggles to find shelter or food. Our woodlands are intensively used by humans and grazed by too many deer, and our rivers polluted by effluent and sewage. Climate change is not helping.



‘We forget, in a world completely transformed by man, that what we’re looking at is not necessarily the environment wildlife prefer, but the depleted remnant that wildlife is having to cope with: what is has it not necessarily what it wants’. **Isabella Tree**

The global outlook for biodiversity is grim. The UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world, and Amersham is not spared. For many people this is so overwhelmingly that they feel any effort is futile. I often feel downcast, but it’s still worth trying to make a difference, and I was sure there were others in Amersham who felt the same way. In November 2021 I suggested to the Amersham Allotment Association that we set up a biodiversity group. A small number of enthusiastic fellow allotment holders met to brainstorm ideas and eventually decided to become an Amersham-wide group named ‘Wild Amersham’. Our key aim was to enable everyone to help make Amersham richer and healthier in biodiversity, but how?

We did not want to reinvent the wheel but benefit from the experience and knowledge of existing community organisations. So rather than setting up a new entity, we joined Sustainable Amersham, closest to us in our objectives and flexible enough to host us as a new group. In addition, we developed good working relationships with many other local organisations,

including the Amersham Band, St Mary’s School, Amersham Hospital, the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT), Amersham Town Council, Amersham Community Board, the Chiltern Society, Work Aid, a local tree surgeon, Tesco, Amersham in Bloom, a photographer and many more.

*‘We should be rebuilding biodiversity wherever and however we can. Sometimes this is as simple as giving plants and animals the space they need to succeed.’*

**David Attenborough**

Our key objective is to enhance and regenerate biodiversity in Amersham - in other words, to make space for nature. We do not plan to turn Amersham into a wilderness but with every bodies help we can create more locations to host wildlife? This could be as simple as people putting up nest boxes in their gardens, a hole in their fence for hedgehogs, or leaving part of their lawn unmown. So we were delighted when three organisations with larger pieces of land approached us to create three sizeable ‘habitat projects’.



Scything at  
Amersham Band

Amersham Band, which dates back to 1845, was recently given the lease of an overgrown field on the corner of Rectory Hill and School Lane to (sustainably) build a Band Hall. The Band approached us to ask for our help in managing the rest of the site for nature. The land is chalk meadow surrounded by shrub, both of which can be very rich in biodiversity. We approached BBOWT and the Community Board for funding and advice. Together with committed Band volunteers, we held a range of nature events. We now manage the meadow and native hedge and monitor species and have already recorded some 85 species of plants and shrubs, as well as many birds and insects. A grass snake slithered away when we were scything

the meadow: one of the reasons why machine mowing is not great for biodiversity!

St Mary's School heard about the work at the Band site and asked us to help it create a wildflower meadow with a heritage orchard as part of its 150th anniversary last year. The land is part of the same chalk meadow as the Band site, but was ploughed, put to grass and used as a playing field which was mown weekly. With support from BBOWT, we set to work. It was wonderful to see what can happen if you give nature a chance: within weeks of simply not mowing the field a stunning meadow with buzzing insects and rare butterflies appeared along with some 60 species of native wildflowers.

More recently we were contacted by Amersham Hospital. A group of active volunteers had turned the Hospital's neglected gardens into a haven of peace. The Hospital asked if we could now help turn its lawns into wildflower meadows. The project is well underway and we are also introducing other wildlife features, such as nest boxes and bug hotels.

We are ecstatic to have already created so much space for nature in Amersham, and grateful to all our partners and volunteers who have helped to make it happen.

*'To reconnect with nature is key if we want to save the planet.' 'Only if we understand, will we care. Only if we care, will we help. Only if we help shall all be saved.'* **Jane Goodall**

Restoring biodiversity in Amersham is obviously our main aim. But are local people aware of what is so special about Chiltern wildlife, and what threats it faces? So we made it a part of our mission to organise events that encourage local people to enjoy and learn more about nature in Amersham. We started in May 2023 with a Dawn Chorus Walk. 30 people met at 5am to listen to spring bird



The dawn chorus walk

melodies in Rectory and Hervines woods. It worked: people raved about the walk and what they learned. Since then we have organised some twenty events for children and adults. We have given a workshop on wildflower identification; constructed nest boxes with children; held a talk about the Misbourne; run a seed swap; trained volunteers in scything, and much more. The events are led by local experts and well attended by enthusiastic local residents. We know we are doing the right thing when children peer at a plant or insect with great fascination; people say 'I learned so much today' or tell us later what bird they heard in their garden or what changes they have made at home to welcome nature.

We would of course like to know whether all our work is, well, working – so we also monitor species in the three habitats (and at Pondwicks). Together with the Bucks Amphibian and Reptile Group, we’ve put down refugia (mats our cold-blooded friends like to shelter under) to monitor their presence or absence. Meanwhile, trained volunteers are surveying wildflowers, and we are also developing ways to monitor birds and insects. One of our supporters is working on a habitat map covering the Amersham area that will hopefully encourage local residents to record species they see.

It is not a bad ‘natural history’ for Wild Amersham’s first two years. We now have an enthusiastic group of volunteers, supportive partners, three habitat projects, well attended regular events and some 85 people receive our newsletter. To carry on and hopefully grow we need more volunteers with time and skills as well as supporters and partners who bring can ideas, contacts and enthusiasm.

If you are interested in finding out more, perhaps attending an event, or signing up to our newsletter or volunteering with us on an occasional or regular basis please email [wildamersham@gmail.com](mailto:wildamersham@gmail.com).

Will Wild Amersham, a small group, turn the tide of biodiversity loss? I don’t know. I do agree with Jane Goodall though that ‘you cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make.’ As Wild Amersham, we decided to make that difference by bringing our community together to enjoy and make space for nature. Seeing the results we are making together in our community, not only inspires us with hope but also brings such joy.

**Marieke Bosman\***

Team Lead of Wild Amersham  
@ Sustainable Amersham

*Is it necessary to say any more?*

*Have you heard the goldfinches singing in the wind, above the final fields?*

*Have you ever been so happy in your life?*

Extract from ‘Goldfinches’ by **Mary Oliver**

\* Marieke is Dutch and studied Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies at SOAS. She spent her career making grants to and advising aid programmes for children and civil society in the Levant. She has lived in Syria, Palestine and Egypt. Over the past few years Marieke has volunteered for nature organisations in the Chilterns and paints wildflowers as @mrsbloem. Marieke lives in Old Amersham with her husband Adrian.



# What's the story behind the blue bottle?

This hexagonal ribbed blue bottle embossed with the words **NOT TO BE TAKEN** is immediately recognisable as a poison bottle – but what did that mean?

By the mid-1800s, with many powerful substances available to buy in a high street apothecary shop or pharmacy, governments became concerned that the public was at risk. In Victorian Britain, a spate of murders caused by poison led to a series of new laws and regulations. From the 1868 Pharmacy Act onwards, registered pharmacists had to pass exams and were only allowed to sell medicinal poisons such as strychnine and opium to known customers. The sales had to be recorded, and the substances had to be stored in ridged poison bottles, so that they couldn't be confused with other drugs.

It's commonly believed that blue glass bottles denote poisonous contents. In fact poison bottles come in a range of colours including green, amber and, more rarely, red. As well as signalling toxic contents, the coloured glass also protected the substance from light damage.

Instead it's the ridged nature of the bottles that is key to indicating that it held something that shouldn't be taken by mouth, or that was restricted in the poisons legislation. Ridged bottles were distinguishable by touch both to the pharmacist and the customer, overcoming any issues with illiteracy, illegible handwritten labels or picking up the wrong bottle in a hectic dispensary.

This blue bottle was intended for a patient to take away their dispensed medicine, perhaps a liniment or other

treatment intended for external use. Its screw top suggests that it dates from the early 20th century, and it was donated to Amersham Museum in 2007.

Although this bottle probably wasn't sold by Haddon's pharmacy, which had been in business directly across the road from the museum from 1892 until 1966, they would have been very familiar with examples like it. For more information about pharmacy history in Amersham, see The Old Pharmacy - Amersham Museum.

The green bottle would also have contained a 'poison' and is in fact labelled **tincture of iodine** – so not to be taken internally. This type of bottle is known as a shop round, designed to hold larger quantities of ingredients and remedies on the shelves in a pharmacy shop.

Briony Hudson



## **Stonor Park, Oxfordshire and Thames Cruise from Henley**

Our outing this year will be to two beautiful locations in Oxfordshire, in the morning we shall visit Stonor Park and then in the afternoon we have booked a Thames cruise travelling on the Hibernia from Henley.

Stonor is a historic country house and deer park set in a wooded valley in the Chiltern Hills. It has been the ancestral family home of the Stonor family for over eight hundred and fifty years. The Lord and Lady Camoys live in the house with their three children. The house is surrounded by 250 acres of parkland. The house and chapel date from the twelfth century with fourteenth and eighteenth century additions and changes. The house contains rare furniture, family portraits, art and treasures collected from around the world. The fortunes of the house and family were strongly tied to

those of the Catholics in Britain.

We shall divide into two groups for our visit to Stonor Park, which will include a one and a half hour guided tour of the property. After this a light lunch of quiche Lorraine and salad, ice cream with coulis and coffee will be provided in the Pantry Kitchen. There will then be time for members to walk in the garden before we leave at 1.50pm for the Hobbs of Henley Boat Yard.

We shall board the Hibernia moored by the Hobbs boatyard. This boat has an uncovered foredeck area for viewing the scenery in the open air and the main saloon area is encased in glass, part of which can be opened in fine weather. There will be commentary about the landmarks we pass.

Tea and cake will be served during our cruise.

### **ITINERARY**

Our coach will be provided by The Coach Company with seating for a maximum of 40 people. There will be two points for collection in the morning and dropping off in the early evening.

- 9.30am Amersham Station (Carrolls).**
- 9.40am The Swan, High Street Old Amersham.**
- 10.40am** Arrive Stonor Park.  
Coffee and biscuits will be served in the Gothic Hall.
- 11.10am** The group will divide into two for the guided tour of the house
- 12.40** The two groups will return to the Pantry Kitchen, where a light lunch will be served (quiche Lorraine\*, salad, ice cream and coulis and coffee).  
*\* Please note on your booking form if you would prefer a vegetarian quiche.*
- 1.50pm** After lunch our members will be free to walk in the grounds.  
We return to the coach for our journey to Hobbs of Henley boatyard for our Thames cruise on the Hibernia.
- 2.30pm** Our river cruise starts. Tea and cake will be served during the cruise.
- 4.30pm** The Hibernia returns to Hobbs boatyard in Henley.
- 4.45pm** The group will board the coach for our return to Amersham.  
The journey takes about 1 hour depending on traffic. We expect to drop off passengers first at the Swan in the High Street, Amersham and then at Amersham Station soon after 5.30pm.

AMERSHAM SOCIETY OUTING : WEDNESDAY 26 JUNE 2024



Photo by Ian Boyle 2006

BOOKING FORM

The inclusive cost of the outing will be £85.50 per person. This will include:

- The cost of the coach journey.
- Coffee and biscuits on arrival in the Gothic Hall at Stonor Park.
- Guided tour of the house lasting one and a half hours.
- Light lunch in the Pantry Kitchen (quiche Lorraine, salad, ice cream with coulis, coffee). \*\*
- Two-hour Thames cruise on the Hibernia including tea and cake.

Please reserve ..... places for me on the outing on 26th June.

I enclose a cheque for £ ..... made payable to the **Amersham Society**.

I / we will join the coach at **Amersham Station (Carrols)** at 9.30am. YES / NO

I / we will join the coach at **The Swan**, Old Amersham at 9.40am. YES / NO

\*\* We would like ..... vegetarian quiche(s) instead of quiche Lorraine.  
(Please indicate number).

NAME(S) .....

ADDRESS .....

TELEPHONE NUMBER .....

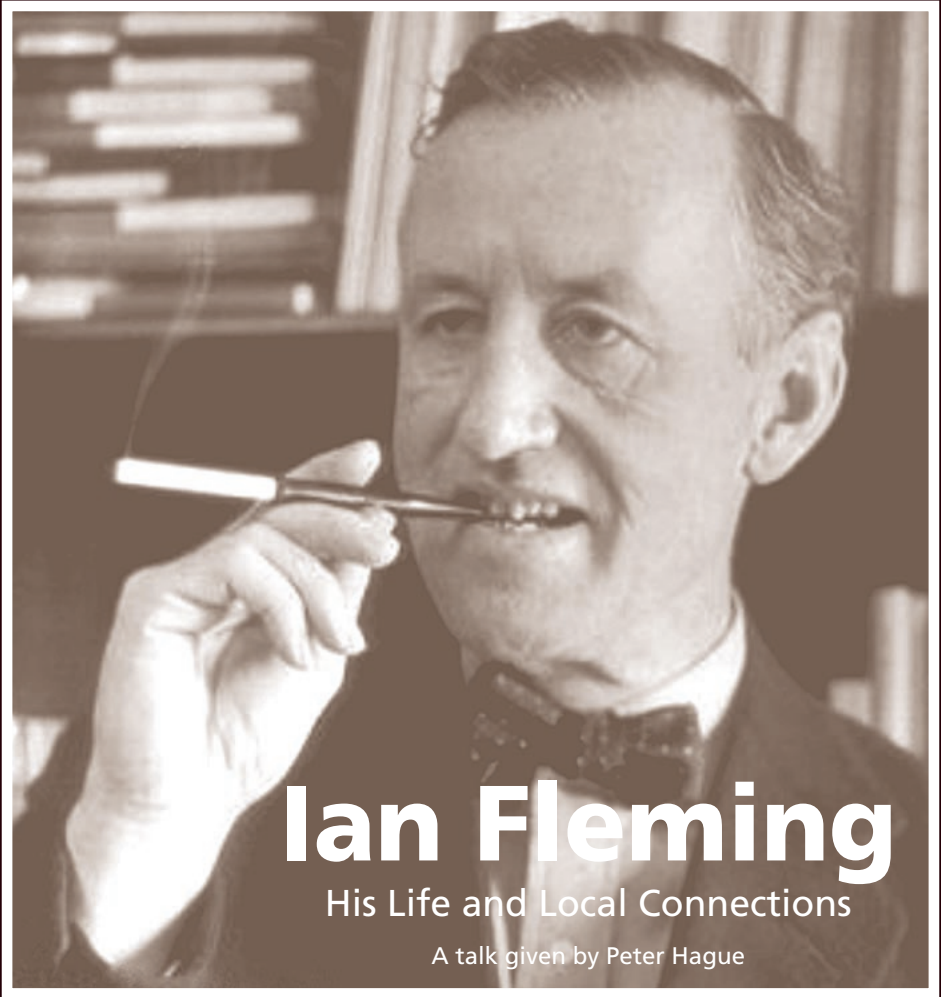
EMAIL ADDRESS .....

Please return your completed application form to:  
**Dorothy Symes, 160b High Street, Amersham, HP7 0EG 01494 434858**

NOTES ON BOOKINGS AND CANCELLATION

We often have to make financial commitments upfront when organising a trip. For this reason we ask you to pay at the time of booking. If you have to cancel your booking before the outing, and we understand that sometimes last minute cancellations can occur, it may be possible to refund the cost if there is a waiting list. We shall try to be flexible.





# Ian Fleming

His Life and Local Connections

A talk given by Peter Hague

Peter Hague is a keen historian and this was his second visit to the Society. His previous talk "Cliveden - Power, Politics and Scandal" was given five years ago.

Until Covid struck a few years ago Peter was a professional drummer and Film and TV 'Extra'. He currently guides at two local stately homes: the National Trust's West Wycombe Park and the privately owned Stonor Park.

In this talk he regaled us with Ian Fleming's dashing life, his family, their affairs and their local connections.



IAN WAS BORN IN MAYFAIR IN 1908, the son of Valentine Fleming and Evelyn St. Croix and the grandson of Robert Fleming, the co-founder of Robert Fleming & Co, the Merchant Bank. His local connections mainly stemmed from Robert Fleming, who had acquired Joyce Grove, a 33 acre estate at Nettlebed, and his father, who had been elected MP for Henley and lived near in Oxfordshire, at Ipsden, near Wallingford.

His father joined the Queen's Own

Oxfordshire Hussars in the First World War and was killed at the battle of the Somme. As a widow his mother inherited Valentine's estate but on doing so was prevented from remarrying. So she became the mistress of Augustus John with whom she had a daughter, Ian's half-sister. Later in her life his mother bought Greys Court in 1934. So this was another of the local connections that Ian would have known from occasional visits to his mother.

His connection with Amersham started in 1942, as in that year he was given the go-ahead to oversee an idea he had conceived the previous year: the creation of a covert fighting unit to carry out dangerous commando-style operations behind German lines which needed unorthodox skills. This was the 30 Commando Assault Unit, christened Fleming's Red Indians.

In November that year he set up his first training camp and HQ at Coldmoreham Farm, a derelict farm house at the edge of Old Amersham. There were 4 or 5 outbuildings where the Unit's vehicles, explosives and weapons were stored. The 120 or so men in the Unit were billeted with local families around the town. They were trained in forced entry, unarmed combat, parachuting, safe-blowing, signalling, swimming and the handling of explosives. Local residents even recall the men practicing amphibious landings from Shardeloes Lake. After taking part in the D-Day landings in 1944 the Unit left Amersham, moving its HQ to Littlehampton. \*\*

Ian was a rascally young boy at Eton, then he attended Sandhurst before going for a time to Universities at Munich and at Geneva.

However on his return and by 1939, he had become a stockbroker with Rowe and Pitman. At the outbreak of the war he joined the Naval Intelligence corps. By 1941 he was involved in "*Operation Goldeneye*" that included setting up

cyber connections between England and first Gibraltar and then later Tangier. This was followed by "*Operation Mincemeat*" that involved deceiving the Germans that the landing of allied forces would be in Greece not Sicily by parachuting a dead body with false documents into enemy hands (later providing him with the basis for "*The Man Who Never Was*".)

He also attended an Anglo-American intelligence summit in Jamaica during which he vowed he would live there after the war.

Throughout his life he had a series of mistresses, including a longstanding one, Ann Charteris who in 1945 had married Esmond Harmsworth, 2nd Viscount Rothermere, the newspaper magnate. After decommissioning he started to work for Kemsley Newspapers. Under his contract he arranged that he was to have a holiday for three months of the year so he could go to Jamaica. Here he bought the home he called *"Goldeneye."* By 1952 he had started his writing of the James Bond novels calling on aspects of his varied life for his character and stories.

In 1952, as Ann was pregnant with his child, he married her in Jamaica after her divorce from Esmond Harmsworth. However she did not like Jamaica and so returned to London for much of the time and here she embarked on an affair with Hugh Gaitskell whilst Ian mostly remained in Jamaica where he continued an affair with a neighbour, Blanche Blackwell, as well as writing further Bond novels, with the first Bond film, *Dr No*, being made in 1962.

As he always was a heavy smoker and drinker, he suffered a heart attack in 1961 and whilst in hospital he started writing his only children's book for his son, Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. He continued writing his Bond novels after he recovered though two of them were not published until after his death. He died in 1964 following a heart attack at a visit to his golf club, Royal St George's Golf in Kent. He was buried in Sevenhampton churchyard near Warneford Place, the estate in Wiltshire he had bought in 1959, had restored and then moved into in 1963.

The lecture was an interesting account of the life of the novelist of whom it could be said his own life played a significant part in his novels.

Mark Ladd



\*\* Additional information regarding Ian Fleming's connection to Amersham came, with thanks, from articles by Tony Westhead (2020) and Richard Meredith (2008).

Wildflowers are a “*form of permanent geography – markers not just of landscapes, but of their autobiographies*”

Richard Mabey, Flora Britannica.

**AN AMERSHAM  
FLOWER TO  
FIND IN SPRING**



Photo by Marieke Bosman

Some years ago, as I made my way to New Amersham through Rectory Wood, my eye was drawn to some large, pale lilac flowers on long stems gently moving in the breeze. I was ready for some exotic garden escapee but on closer inspection learned that these beautiful woodland plants were in fact Coralroot (*Cardamine bulbifera*). Coralroot is one of the last plants that made the crossing from the Continent before the North Sea inundated the passage. Wild colonies of this plant only occur in two areas in the UK: the wet woods of the Weald and the calcareous beech woods of the Chilterns. This makes it Coralroot rare and very local, and it is not surprising that it appears in the Amersham town crest. Part of the Brassicacea family, Coralroot spreads through its roots and by dispersion of the tiny brown bulbils that appear on its stem. Coralroot flowers from April to June – do go and let yourself be enchanted by this Amersham flower.

By Marieke Bosman from Wild Amersham





# New Light on the Origins of Copperkins Lane

by Nick Gammage

In the January Newsletter Alison Bailey described the longstanding mystery surrounding the origins of the curiously named Copperkins Lane between Hyde Heath and Amersham Common including one popular explanation - that Copperkins Lane took its name from the copper skins of travellers who camped each year along its verges on the margins of the Common.

As Alison pointed out there is another “Copperkins” in this area: a small grassy hollow covered by trees to one side of the extensive steeply sloping field to the west of Amersham Rectory (Grid Reference SU 956982) described on 19th Century O.S Maps of the area as “Copperkins Dell”.





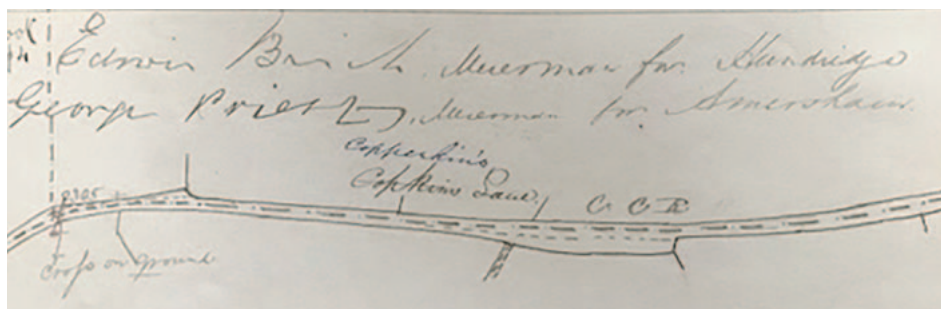
The “copper skins” suggestion is plausible as Copperkins Lane was indeed once part of an ancient drovers’ road running from Wales through the Chilterns and across Amersham Common to the London livestock markets. However, a group of old deeds relating to a little-known but clearly influential family living in Medieval Amersham - the Coperkyngs – and the remarkable sketch books of an Ordnance Survey surveyor provide compelling evidence for an alternative explanation.

At a time when spelling was haphazard at best the Coperkyng family name is found recorded in a number of variants: Coperkyng, Coperking, Kopping, Cuppyng. The earliest recorded mention of the family I have discovered comes in a charter of around 1275 held in the Cartulary of Missenden Abbey which relates to a

*“Grant by Henry de Sythre to Reginald Coperkyng of an annual rent of twelve pence arising out of the tenement of Alice de Sythre in the parish of Great Missenden. For this concession Reginald has given him ten shillings”*

In simple terms, Reginald Coperkyng (“*Reginaldo Coperkyng*” in the legal Latin of that charter) is renting out a home in Great Missenden parish to Alice de Sythre. Two other documents from that period, now held in the National Archives, locate the Coperkyngs even closer to Amersham and Chesham Bois.

A deed of 1340 recorded in The Catalogue of Ancient Deeds Held in the Public Record Office (HMSO, 1894) relates to a “*Martyn Coperkyng of Chesham.*” It renders null and void a bond between Martyn and his son “*William Coperking*”.



“C. 2286. Defeasance of a bond by Martyn Coperkyng, of Chesham, and William Coperking his son, by which they are bound to each other, the said Martyn in 100s. and the said William in 10 marks, the said bond being in the hands of John de le Sekersteyn, of Agmodesham; witnessing that if the said Martyn shall not demise, for term of his life, any of his lands in the parish of Chesham except a plot called 'Collinggeswyk' without William's consent, and if the said William shall not withdraw himself from the service and support of his parents, the said bond shall be void. Sunday after Michaelmas, 13 Edward III. French”.

The “Collinggeswyk” referred to here is an ancient Chesham field name – meaning “Colin’s farm”.

The second deed, from 1311, brings the Coperkyng family into Chesham Bois, even closer to the line of Copperkins Lane. It records the outcome of an inquiry following the death of William de Brianzon to establish the extent of his lands (known as an “Inquisition Post Mortem”). Held on “Saturday, the morrow of the Circumcision” (i.e. January 2nd, 1311), it established that William’s lands included a significant holding of 48 acres in Chesham Bois which he had been

leasing from one Robert Coperkyng:

“Boys in Cesteresham (i.e. Chesham Bois). The hamlet, held of John de Goys by service of 1/2 knight’s fees; 4a. meadow and a watercourse for his mill, held of Robert de Véer, earl of Oxford, by service of 6s. 8d. yearly; 6a. land held of Humphrey de Boun, earl of Hert(ford) (sic), by service of 21d. yearly; 24a. land held of the manor of La Grave, which is in the king’s hand, by service of 8s. 8d. yearly; **and 42a. land held of Robert Coperkyng by service of 12d. yearly.**”

This is unlikely to have been the Coperkyng family’s only land holding in the area. They were clearly influential, appearing as witnesses on deeds relating to other powerful local families such as Thomas of Agmodesham of Quarrendon Farm, and Adam and Walter Wace.

It is easy to imagine how in 14th century Amersham that ancient track might have been related to a nearby landowner and spoken of as Coperkyng’s Lane and the hollow known as Coperkyng’s Dell. It is easy to imagine too how that name would be heard as “Copkin’s” or “Copperkin’s”, and how over time it came to be written down as Copperkins Lane and Copperkins Dell.

This theory seems to be confirmed by the remarkable notebooks and sketch maps of Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Blayney Coddington of the Ordnance Survey who in 1869 surveyed the area to establish parish boundaries.

Coddington's notebooks now in the National Archives show he walked the boundaries with the local "meresmen" George Priest of Amersham (parish clerk, cricketer, landlord of the Hare and Hounds); Henry Glenister of Manor Farm Chesham Bois, and Edwin Birch of Hundridge, sketching as he went – "meresman" being an archaic word used to describe someone empowered to agree local boundaries.



On one sketch he draws Copperkins Lane as "*Copkins Lane*". But on the next page "*Copkins*" is crossed out and replaced by Copperkins. George Priest and Edwin Birch have signed the page to show the approve the change.

In the revised printed version of his map, printed in 1874, Coddington makes the same change. The printed "*Copkins*

*Lane*" - how it had previously been written - is crossed out and replaced by hand in red ink by "*Copperkins Lane*".

The surname Coperkyng is itself of obscure origin. Ernest Weekley's great reference work Surnames (1916) records Coperkyng as an "obsolete compound surname" made up of two elements, "*Coper*" and "*Kyng*" or "*King*". That 'Coper' is problematic: there is no evidence of Copper deposits or smelting in the Chilterns. 'Coper' may have its root in a Middle French verb meaning to strike, but that is far from certain. It is sometimes found written on the Continent as Kuppung. And what about that "*king*"?

While those Medieval deeds might help explain the origin of Copperkins Lane and Dell they at the same time create their own mystery: who were the Coperkyng family? and what became of them?

They do not appear in any of the histories of this area and there appear to be no references to them later than the 14th century. Did the male line simply die out? Do any Coperkyng descendants remain in the Amersham/Chesham Bois area or elsewhere?

If so, it would be fascinating to hear from them.

**Nick Gammage**

# Growing up at The Eagle

Think and thank

By Marian Borrows



Marian writes: I was prompted to write this article by the installation of the floral clock in the Memorial Gardens to commemorate the coronation of Charles III. It reminded me of a fascinating, unpublished, type-written manuscript (Some Amersham Reflections 1895-1970, R. J. Mason, reference I505-90) I had discovered in the Buckinghamshire Archives in Aylesbury. The author's parents had kept The Eagle for 40 years and he describes how clocks measured the passing of time in Amersham:

There was Church time, Town Hall time, Post Office time, Railway time and my father's pocket watch.



One of Reg Mason's most vivid memories was when he was five years old, sitting with his family in front of a glowing coal fire. The year was 1901 and his mother remarked that now that the Queen had died they would have to get used to saying God save the King when they sang the national anthem. Little did they know that the country would face even more enormous changes to their lives in Amersham, namely two world wars.

But I digress. First of all, let's look at daily life at The Eagle pub through the eyes of a growing boy. The garden was filled with a variety of buildings. There was stabling for two horses beside the river and two toilets with a wash house between them. The wash house contained a large iron mangle and a pump, complete with a lead spout over a stone sink which drained into the river. Incidentally, this was an especially busy place on pig-killing days, for the knives were sharpened and washed at the sink. A copper heated the water. It had no tap and the hot water was bailed out with a dipper into a very large bath. When washing was finished, it was emptied out into the Misbourne. Many tubs, dollies, and clothes baskets filled the room. In front of the wash house door was a telegraph pole carrying about 40 wires. It eventually became redundant and was removed. There were other poles with nesting boxes for pigeons. The young birds were a delicacy and sold to the butcher who paid one and four pence a pair. The pigsty was unused but it was a secret place for a boy to have a smoke - not always an enjoyable experience.

In an open-sided shed was stored the press and machinery for the seasonal cider

making. There were no dustbins but an ash pit. This was a high building with a sloping roof. Anything unwanted was stored there. Later, it fell out of use. His younger brother took it over and kept a variety of birds. Reg was dismissive of this collection. They fought as siblings are wont to do which, on one occasion, resulted in a humorous incident with an air gun and peppered backsides and Reg making a joke about turning the other cheek. Baby chicks were reared and hens had proper roosting perches. Corn was collected from the busy Town Mill and wheat obtained from his uncle for their feed. The eggs were a welcome addition to the diet.

Butting on to the High Street was a long shed. Once thought to be a skittle alley but was used as a coal and wood store. Plenty of redundant wood was obtainable from the chair making industry in Wycombe.

Inside the pub was the tap room which was a warm welcoming space. There was a large fireplace and on the hearth a copper device for warming your beer, a drink Reg do not like! There were many games built into the room, namely "*ring the bull*" and "*pitch penny*" - this game was beneath the window seat, in a drawer. There were shove ha'penny boards and dominoes, all well-polished with use, but no playing cards. The room often resounded to impromptu singing of local songs accompanied by the accordion and the bones.

The smoke room was mainly used by the Slate Club for their meetings. This was a self-help group. They saved money when they could and helped each other out in times of need. There was a rule book and an elected committee. At Christmas time any money left in the kitty would be spent

on a special meal. The food would be prepared in the pub kitchen and the baker next door would help out with cooking. Grace was always said at the start of the meal and the plates they ate off had a simple motto round the edge *"Think" and "Thank"*. For many townspeople the great fear was to be declared a pauper and sent to the workhouse, so the Club provided much-needed support.

The cellar was so called because it held the barrels of beer on wooden stands, not because it was underground. It had other equipment for tapping the barrels – a specialised job. The kitchen had a large table and Reg remembered many family meals eaten here, especially toad in the hole and the Michaelmas goose. There were plenty of shelves to store the many dishes and utensils needed. The water from the sink ran into a bucket. This was poured into the swill bin outside the back door. This was to feed their uncle's pigs. In return he supplied them with tasty pork-related offerings.

So we come to the devastating changes that the two world wars brought to Amersham. In the First World War so many men had died that it became impossible to run large estates like Shardeloes. Also, their properties in the town were put up for sale. The Drake family also suffered a personal loss. Herbert William Tyrwhitt-Drake was killed in March 1915. He was a trooper in the Hussars. He had ridden in two Grand Nationals and had been responsible for the Amersham Races. For all the others who lost their lives their names will for ever be remembered on the War Memorial.

In 1929 the Weller family sold the brewery. All the metal signs advertising Weller's Peculiar were removed from the pubs they had owned and the recipe for this beverage was forgotten. Also lost forever would be the sound of the hooves of the shire horses on the town cobbles and the sight of the jauntily tasselled caps of the draymen as they delivered beer around the county.

Reg vividly recounts many memories of growing up in Amersham. I found particularly memorable that at the outbreak of World War I the Scouts were sent to defend the Water Tower against enemy attack. Boys' trousers were lined with cotton – undergarments were not commonly available. Later on, boys could visit the draper's in Whielden Street to choose a material and have a suit made. Fleas and lice were a common irritation and a source of shame (they were said to be picked up on trains!) Goose grease was a cure-all for common ailments. Also it would be used to waterproof boots. (When I taught near the London docks in the '60s, goose grease would be liberally coated on children's chests to keep out the cold).

Written and oral archives not only inform us of the rich and famous, but also give the ordinary townsfolk a voice. R. G. Mason is among many voices from the past whose reflections bring our town alive. In his memoir he comes over as observant, imaginative and wryly humorous. I hope to find out more about him.

**Marian Borrows**

# The Chiltern Foodbank



An introduction from **Elizabeth Shepherd**:

Why did I choose the Chiltern Foodbank as my Mayor's charity... because I thought "if you can't afford to put food on the table, how can you cope with anything else in your life?"

I contacted Diane Rutter, the Coordinator of the Foodbank and when we met, I was impressed by the commitment, the non-judgemental attitude and the kindness of Diane and the volunteers. The Foodbank is clearly a well-run organisation and provides a vital service to people in food crisis in our community. However, food insecurity is often just one facet of the difficulties people face, so in addition to dealing the food crisis, the Foodbank works with other agencies commissioning them to help people deal with other issues in their lives.

I have had an opportunity to work with volunteers at a collection point in Tesco's in Old Amersham, and met people who said they were donating to the Foodbank as a way of paying back the help they had received in the past. The generosity of shoppers was humbling; kindness works and I am even more proud to support the Foodbank at the end of my term of office as I was at the start.

## **Diane Rutter, the CEO of the Chiltern Foodbank, writes:**

A Foodbank for Amersham? Really?  
Are there people in Amersham who can't afford food?

Unfortunately, yes.

About a third of our Chiltern Foodbank's clients are based in Amersham and Little Chalfont. And about a third of the people we are feeding are children – I find that shocking.

In 2023 Chiltern Foodbank provided over 42,000 meals to people in need.

Who are the people who are struggling to put food on the table? Many are in employment, but their wages don't cover the costs of living in Amersham. Private rents are high. Inflation is still with us and salaries are often not keeping pace, replacing any item that breaks down, can push a household budget to breaking point. The same is true for many people on benefits, where the money is not enough to cover all their costs. And many people unexpectedly find themselves in a health crisis which throws



everything else out of balance in their lives. Statutory sick pay doesn't cover most people's pre-existing bills. And finding your way through money troubles just adds to stress and impedes recovery.

So, it is vital that we all have compassion, playing our part in helping those who are currently struggling, and lobbying for change to stop more people falling into the poverty trap. Fortunately, there is compassion in abundance in Amersham.

People in Amersham are very generous, for which we are very grateful.

Almost all of the food that we give out to people in need is donated to us by local people. We have a network of Food Champions in Amersham, who collect food from their neighbours, work colleagues, church congregations or other groups that they are part of. The Tesco Amersham Superstore has a permanent collection basket for the Foodbank, and our volunteers pick up food donated by their customers three times a week.

Did you know that Tesco also gives us a financial top up based on the amount of food donated? And their Community Champion, BJ, is always keen to support us. A month before Christmas we had

a 3-day collection at Tesco, when our volunteers gave out shopping lists and told shoppers about the work of the Foodbank. Amersham's Mayor, Elizabeth Shepherd, helped out, wearing her mayoral chain.

In fact, Elizabeth made us her mayoral charity and has been out and about raising awareness of the Foodbank, and raising funds for us throughout the year, which has been fantastic.

People in need are referred to us by over 140 referral partners in our local area. The majority of referrals come via Citizens Advice, Buckinghamshire Council's Helping Hands, and Paradigm Housing. Others come via social workers, children's services, mental health services, schools, GP surgeries, faith groups etc.

We provide boxes of nutritionally balanced store cupboard food, based on who is in the household and their particular needs. Our teams of volunteers sort the donated food, pack the boxes, and deliver them to people in need at their own homes.

We also provide toiletries, household cleaning products, and dog and cat food too. All these things cost money, and are needed in order to maintain a healthy life and home.

Our volunteers run a streamlined and effective operation, and have been able to step up each time the numbers of people in need has increased over the past 13 years. But we are not trying to be bigger and better! Actually, we would all prefer for the Foodbank not to be needed at all. Our vision is of a community where everyone can buy the basic essentials in life themselves – and yes, food is a basic essential!



To this end, we have three strategic objectives:

**1.** That everyone should be able to access emergency food when they need it – this is what the majority of our volunteers are involved in, getting emergency food parcels to people who need it. This is what we are most known for. If you know someone in need of food, please pass on the food crisis line number at the end of this article to them, and encourage them to reach out.

**2.** To reduce the need for people to keep returning to the Foodbank – we don't want people to get stuck, unable to support themselves and their households. So, we work with lots of other local groups to get help for our clients.

E.g. Oasis project runs a cooking course on how to cook nutritious meals on a low budget, Christians Against Poverty help devise debt action plans for people and support them to become debt free, we have fast track access into benefits review and advice for our clients through our partnership with Citizens Advice - and lots more. By working in partnership with these and other local groups, we can get our clients additional support at this tricky time in their lives. And money that is donated to us enables us to buy in some of these other services for our clients, to help them find their way

through the crisis that they find themselves in.

**3.** To raise awareness of the causes of poverty, and work to address these. We work closely with the Trussell Trust and other poverty alleviation agencies to do this. You might be aware of the national “*guarantee our essentials*” campaign? <https://www.trusselltrust.org/get-involved/campaigns/guarantee-our-essentials/>

Foodbanks have become prevalent across Britain today. I used to be a humanitarian aid worker, and I've worked in food distribution in crises overseas – I never dreamed at that time that I would come home and distribute food to people in crisis in the leafy Chilterns. But here we are. We do what we can. And I would like to say a big thankyou from me and all the volunteers at the Foodbank to everyone in our communities who is helping us to help others!

If it is you who needs help right now – then reach out. We are here for you. And we know that you will be here for others when you are back on your feet again!

If you need food please phone the Food Crisis line on either of these freephone numbers:

**0808 175 7123**

**01494 785660**

Diane has been working at the Foodbank since January 2021. She is, in her words, “*part time paid, and everyone else is a volunteer*”. She is also a Charity Adviser and Trainer in the UK. Diane was previously a humanitarian aid worker with Médecins Sans Frontières and an international development worker for various international NGOs, distributing food in overseas crises. She has also worked in emergency public health, particularly with regard to the impact of long term poverty on communities.

# Marie-Louise von Motesiczky in Amersham

By Alison Bailey



*Courtesy of the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust*

L to R,  
Elinor von Lieben  
(Marie-Louise's cousin),  
Marie-Louise and Elias  
Canetti in the garden  
of Cornerways, 1940s

Paintings by a widely acclaimed European Expressionist artist, which were created in Amersham, feature in the inaugural exhibition of Amersham Museum's new gallery space. The exhibition opened in March and includes the six paintings donated to the museum by the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust. The Trust funded the museum's 'New View' project which includes the creation of the new gallery, named after the artist, for temporary exhibitions, and a new introductory space and timeline, illustrated by local artist, Elly Bazigos.

Marie in Doorway, 1954, Amersham Museum collection,  
Marie-Louise painted this affectionate portrait of  
Marie-Hauptmann after her death.

Marie-Louise arrived in Amersham in 1940 when she was 34. Her aristocratic family was of Jewish heritage, and in 1938 she fled her native Vienna and travelled via Amsterdam to England. In unfamiliar surroundings, she created a new life for herself in a small terraced house on Amersham Common.

## The Motesiczky Family in Amersham

Marie-Louise was just getting established as a painter, after holding her first solo exhibition in The Hague. She arrived in England with her mother, Henriette and Marie Hauptmann, her childhood nanny who took on the role of housekeeper. She was very close to Marie-Louise and helped take care of Henriette, who suffered from frequent bouts of ill health and could be very demanding.

Initially the family lived in Hampstead but soon they decided to leave London during the Blitz. Amersham was within easy reach of London so Marie-Louise could remain in touch with friends in the city. The Motesiczkys found lodgings with recently widowed Lottie Meakin at a house then called Edale, on Stubbs Wood (now number 41) overlooking the Chess Valley. Her husband, Walter Meakin, had been a Labour Party member, and a founding member of the National Union of Journalists.



## Cornerways

Although the Motesiczkys arrived with only a few possessions, in 1940 they could afford to buy Cornerways, an end of terrace cottage, in a row of three, on the corner of Chestnut Lane and Chestnut Close. There was a large garden which wrapped around the house and backed on to a public footpath.

Henriette recorded her initial reaction to the house:  
*“from the outside it appears totally unassuming; I fell in love with the interior and the arrangement of the rooms. It really was so totally right for us – we could not have found anything better.”*

Marie-Louise’s brother Karl, who remained in Austria and later died in Auschwitz, sent some of the family’s belongings, and several of Marie-Louise’s paintings, enabling them to furnish their new home with familiar items. Dutch and German paintings, a Russian rug, an inlaid desk and dining table, and large, ornate wardrobes created an echo of a lost Vienna.



Snow Drift with Gate, early 1940s, Amersham Museum collection, showing the view across Chestnut Lane of the drive, field, trees, and hedges of the Elangeni estate after a snow fall.

Henriette described her first impressions of Chestnut Lane: *“It is situated in a calm, shady street in which, thank God, there are no elegant villas but only small inconspicuous little houses and large meadows and gardens which belong to large estates. An old dairy with wonderful, age-old chestnut trees, grazing cows and horses is opposite us. Also quite close is a pub, from where you can carry very warm beer across the road in the summer.”*

The residents of Chestnut Lane were Marie-Louise’s community, the people she would have walked past and greeted, or seen in the local shop or pub. Several even became subjects of her vivid, dramatic portraits.

After the war Marie-Louise moved back to London, where she lived until her death in 1996. Her mother and Marie carried on living in the house in Amersham with Marie-Louise visiting most weekends and continuing to paint there. After suffering a series of strokes, Marie died in 1954. Henriette was becoming increasingly frail, and after Marie-Louise bought a large house in Hampstead, she moved there in 1960. Cornerways was rented out and eventually sold in the 1970s after planning permission was granted for two new bungalows in the garden.

The garden, which features in many paintings, included a lawn tennis court, vegetable garden and fruit trees. The Motesiczkys continued to grow vegetables, which they stored in a lean-to by the house. They used the tennis net to cordon off the orchard, creating a pen for 15 chickens to roam. In the summer their many émigré friends, including the writer and later Nobel Laureate, Elias Canetti, would relax in deckchairs or the comfortable garden hammock. The household included Marie’s black cat, Susi, and the first of many dogs, Philip, a corgi, who Marie-Louise also painted.

## Chestnut Lane

Cornerways was located on an unmade country lane with no street-lights or pavements. The road finished at Quill Hall Farm, which was surrounded by fields and views of the Chess Valley. There was one pub, The Red Lion, and a small shop, Chestnut Stores, which sold newspapers, groceries, and tobacco for Henriette’s pipe.



Deckchair in the Garden, 1940s, Amersham Museum collection, showing a view of the deserted garden at sunset, from an open ground floor window in Marie-Louise's studio.



## Professional Success

Marie-Louise contributed several paintings to émigré artists' exhibitions during the 1940s, whilst living in Amersham. She became a naturalised British Citizen in 1948 but it took far longer for her to achieve the professional recognition she deserved in her adopted country. In 1985 she had a retrospective exhibition in London at the Goethe-Institute when she was hailed as a major discovery and a “dazzling talent”.

Marie-Louise never needed to sell her work and always found it difficult to let go of her ‘children’ as she called her paintings. After her death, most of

her work passed to the charitable trust that she had recently established. The trust has now distributed many paintings among public collections throughout the world, more than achieving her own ambition that:

*“if you could only paint a single good picture in your lifetime, your life would be worthwhile”.*

The exhibition will be free with museum entry and will run until 26th August 2024, Wednesday to Sunday 12pm to 4.30pm.

Please see [amershammuseum.org](http://amershammuseum.org) for more information.

**Alison Bailey**



## getting nearer to being built!

There are two big planning applications in the Old Town that just seem to keep rumbling on, the Maltings and Aldi.

Carol Chesney, our Planning Officer, monitors their progress on our behalf and here she gives us an update on the Aldi application which was first submitted three years ago in May 2021.

Aldi's website says they are working on exciting plans for a new store in Amersham, which would provide local people with easier access to their *"popular, high quality, great value offer"*. Currently their customers are travelling out of the Amersham area to visit its stores so they have wanted to open a local store in Amersham for some time. The former Jaguar dealership site will be developed using sustainable construction materials and techniques to provide a fresh, modern food store.

This investment will create at least 40 new jobs which Aldi would seek to recruit locally. The site will be landscaped to complement the local area. There will be 101 parking bays including for blue badge holders, parents and children and EV charging points alongside cycle parking.

In terms of how Aldi will complement the existing offerings of local and independent stores, it states that there won't be an in-house bakery, butcher, fishmonger, deli-catessen or chemist nor do they propose selling items such as cigarettes, so they see their existence as *"encouraging linked trips to the town ...to keep spending local."*

The planning application (PL/21/1309/FA) received a response from the Environment Agency in March removing their previous objection which is a step towards a final decision. The Amersham Society recently submitted the following comment regarding the importance of the external appearance.

*"On behalf of the Amersham Society, I would like to express our support for the proposed development in principle, but we respectfully request that Planning refer to the Conservation Application Consultation Response dated 31 July 2021 expressing concerns about the design and suggesting Design Review Panel involvement.*

*The position of the proposed store is, effectively, the gateway to Old Amersham and adjacent to the Chequers Public House and Bury Mill, both Grade II listed buildings, so its design will impact on these heritage assets and Old Amersham in general. A good example of blending the new with the old is the Neptune store on the approach to Chesham's old town. It is designed as a mill as a 'nod to its heritage' given its situation near the river Chess, with wood/larch plank siding and a large flint wall at one end.*



A Computer Generated Image of the new store (Aldi website) - its external appearance being the point at issue.

*There are precedents for Aldi adopting external façade materials in keeping with the local vernacular to complement the surroundings rather than their standard, severe white rendering. Such locations include: Chipping Norton (Cotswolds stone used), Lakeland Aldi (dark brick, wood siding and grey panels), Aldi Poynton (red brick used) and Clitheroe (pitched roof, buff bricks) to name a few.*

*As such, we request that the final decision reflect the above concerns to enable The Amersham Society to fully throw its support behind the application."*

# NOTICEBOARD

## Programme of Talks and Events

Talks are held in the Kings Chapel, 30 High Street, Old Amersham.  
Coffee, tea and biscuits served from 7:30pm, with talks starting at 8pm.

Wednesday 29th May

### **Bagels and Bacon**

A talk by Jeff Rozelaar.

Wednesday 26th June

### **Amersham Society Outing**

Stonor Park and Thames Cruise from Henley.

June

### **Garden Party**

Details to be confirmed.

Wednesday 25th September

### **Man on the Spot**

Bill Hamilton's career has been in journalism and broadcasting  
ending as a special correspondent for BBC TV News.

## **Amersham Society Officers**

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**Geraldine Marshall-Andrew**

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**Dorothy Symes**

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