



**JANUARY 2025**

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







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Cover image: Line drawing of the Market Hall by Enid Butcher – see page 20.  
Photograph opposite: Bluebells in Hervines Park by Linda Gould –  
Trustee of Amersham Museum and member of Amersham Photographic Society.

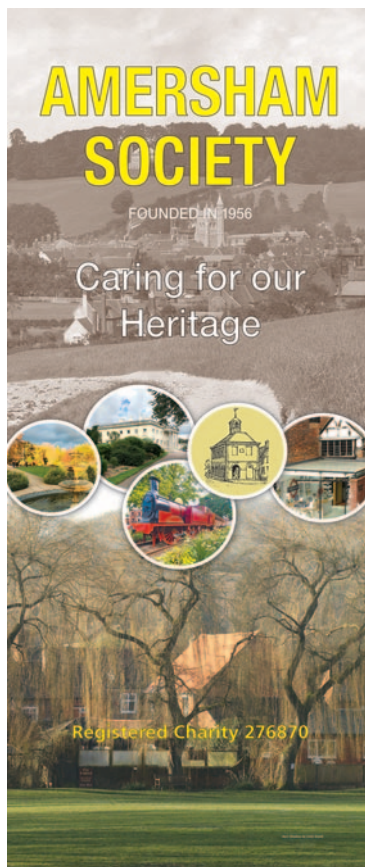


# Editorial

Happy New Year and welcome to the 69th year of the Society and another Amersham Society newsletter. The underlying theme through the three magazines this year will be "*Our caring society*": how we, as a society, live and have lived together supporting one-another. The first article on this theme is about "*Restore Hope*" (see page 10), a charity based at Latimer, which was touched on in September's issue as having just purchased St John's church in order to expand its outreach work. And in our next issue (May) there will be an article about how we cared for our "*paupers*" following the passing of the Poor Law in 1834.

Just before Christmas you received an E-alert with a brand new Riverside Walk guide (along with copious historical, geological and environmental notes) forming part of the Society's "*River Misbourne Project*". This is not the first local guide the Society has produced; a leaflet was printed 50 years ago, in 1975: "*Amersham – A walk around the Old Town*" (see page 20). Also part of the "*River Misbourne Project*" was a second Information Panel, unveiled in Barn Meadow by our Town Mayor, Dominic Pinkney on 14th December (see page 5).

The Society has a new banner. Those of you who came along to our AGM on 30th October, which was followed by a heartfelt talk about "*Chapter Two Community Bookshop*" (see page 34), will have seen it. I hope you like it,



It was designed by Danny Robins, who is the graphic designer responsible for our newsletters, with images kindly supplied by the Amersham Museum, Linda Gould and Elena Morgan.

As you will see on the back cover of this newsletter, this year's talks cover a wide range of topics which I'm sure you'll find interesting. They've been devised and booked by Yvonne Suckling, who has joined Geraldine Marshall-Andrew as our "*Events team*" with additional help from Barbara Turner. Can I draw your attention to three points:

- There will be no Programme leaflet this year. The calendar of talks will be printed on the back cover of each newsletter as well as being available to view on our website. As usual you will be reminded of all the talks and their dates in our regular E-alerts.
- With effect from February the talks will move from a Wednesday and take place on (usually) the last Monday of each month.
- Our June talk will be held in Amersham-on-the-Hill in the Lifestyle Centre.

It was really disappointing that a stalwart member of our committee, Dorothy Symes, formally stepped down at the AGM. Dorothy has been (and remains) a member of the Amersham Society for the past 18 years, serving on the committee for 14 years, four of those as our Chair and Newsletter editor. She also led the Events team in devising our monthly talks and annual outings from 2009 and was the "*face*" of the Society at all our meetings. At the AGM our Chairman, Edward Copisarow, thanked Dorothy for the amazing amount of work she had done on behalf of the Society, particularly guiding us through the Covid crisis.

We are also sad to lose one of our newest committee members, Carol Chesney. She was our Planning Officer for two years, but work commitments meant she was no longer able to do full justice to the role. Geraldine Marshall-Andrew, our Hon. Secretary, has very kindly agreed to take on the brief on a temporary basis until a replacement can be found.

### **THE SOCIETY NEEDS YOU!**

Forgive me, but to get boring for a moment. The Society's constitution states, for good reason, that the running of it needs to be in the hands of four "*Officers*" and up to a "*Committee*" of eight. Currently we have just eight members, in total, managing the Society. The two paragraphs above speak for themselves; we need some more help to enable the Society to fulfil its aims. Could you help us? If so please do contact me or any other committee member.

It's the character of your town we are protecting. We support the wonderful museum and involve the local community by organising lectures, visits, newsletters and a phenomenal website.

Last but by no means least: We are always delighted to have new members and since our last newsletter was published we offer a warm welcome to: Daisy and Adam Williams who live in Old Amersham, Annie Jardine from Prestwood and Sarah Halton, a resident of Amersham Common.

**John Catton**

richard.catton1@ntlworld.com

# Amersham Society Subscriptions 2025

This note is to remind you that your Annual Subscription to the Amersham Society became due on 1st January 2025. By decision at the AGM in October 2024, the amount payable was increased to **£16.50** for an individual member, or **£25** for two family members living at the same address. We did attempt to inform every member by email, or in a few cases by letter. Therefore, almost certainly, by the time you read this, you will have already paid your subscription on or about the 2nd January.

I must apologise for some confusion amongst those who pay by direct debit via our agent GoCardless, who will in most cases have had a proliferation of contradictory emails. I still do not understand exactly what happened but it was presumably caused by a mistake on my part, so if anybody would like to take over as Membership Secretary please volunteer now. I believe the mistake has now been corrected and the correct amount taken, but no doubt you will tell me if that is wrong. GoCardless claim that payments for this subscription will appear on my bank statement as GoCardless, ref: AMERSHAM SOCIETY DM9V3 but in fact all my bank statement usually says is GoCardless. That's irritating that it is not more explicit but to change it would cost us a lot more, so please don't panic if you see GoCardless and £16.50 or £25 on your bank statement - it's not a scam.

If you pay by standing order (no longer available to new members), nearly all our members have now corrected them to reflect the increases in subscription in 2017 and 2025, but if you have not, you will soon receive an e-mail or a letter from me asking for the balance. We cannot change your standing order –

you have to do that by going in to your bank or changing it on-line. If you would like to pay in future by direct debit, rather than standing order, please e-mail me at [peterborrows@cantab.net](mailto:peterborrows@cantab.net) and I can arrange for that to be set up.

If, sadly, your partner or spouse died during the year, did you remember to change the subscription? Of course, we are happy to accept the excess as a small donation.

If you are one of the handful of people who pay by cash or cheque (and a few have paid already - thank you!) 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](mailto:peterborrows@cantab.net) and I can arrange for both the 2025 and subsequent payments to be taken by direct debit (as long as you have an e-mail address).

If you are not sure how you pay, or for any other problems, please e-mail me at [peterborrows@cantab.net](mailto: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 forthcoming events and sometimes include new information not in the 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](mailto: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.

# A second Information Panel unveiled - in Barn Meadow

About 20 people gathered on the cold but clear afternoon of 14th December on Barn Meadow to watch the Mayor of Amersham (and Amersham Society member), Dominic Pinkney, unveil the Amersham Society's second River Misbourne information panel. The first, on Church Mead, was unveiled by Dominic last July – see Newsletter Sept 2024. The Society's vice-chair, John Catton, presided and thanked those who had supported the project and introduced the project leader, Peter Borrows.

Peter explained that the impetus to erect the two panels came when he heard that Affinity Water was proposing to restore the River Misbourne back to a more natural state. We felt this would be an opportunity to explain something of the ecology of chalk streams and show how the river had become damaged through industrialisation. We don't think of Amersham as industrial but as well as the corn mills on Mill Lane (and even further upstream at Little Missenden) and Bury End (and downstream at Quarrendon Farm), there was the fulling mill at or near Church Mead, a cotton mill (later a silk mill) where Tesco now is, and the Maltings built by the Wellers in 1827 had a water wheel to power hoists. Affinity Water's efforts are already yielding results. When he, Steve Catanach and Chloe, from Affinity Water, visited the river recently they spotted a trout.



John Catton introducing Dominic Pinkney, Mayor of Amersham and Peter Borrows, the Project Leader.

Peter concluded by thanking the Amersham Town Council, Steve Catanach, Amersham Museum, the Dulcie Denison will trust and two Society members Graham Cook and Brian Withington (in memory of his late wife) for all their contributions and especially the designer Helen Walsh for her beautiful pictures of the wildlife. He also thanked all members of the Amersham Society, who had contributed a bit over £1.30 of their annual subscription, both this year and last, to the project. He hoped they felt the money was well-spent.



The new panel admired by Society members.

# THE AMERSHAM FAIR ORGAN MUSEUM

## Its History and Origins

Following a visit to the Amersham Fair Organ Museum in 2024 I asked Ben Ely, its Secretary, if he would write an article for the Amersham Society about the history of this unique collection and its founder, Albert Edward 'Teddy' Reed. The result falls into two parts: the history of Mr. Reed and that of the Museum collection itself. At the end you will find the details of the Museum's opening dates this year.

### Plantation Road, Amersham

An association with the Museum site was already established by 1926 when Mr. Reed was born at 'Nine Gables' (situated at the entrance to the yard). Ted was one of six children born to Albert & Clara Reed, the former having established a sawmill on-site and brickworks at Hyde Heath and Hartwell nr. Aylesbury to support his building firm Albert Reed Construction. At this time Albert Reed Snr's major project was the erection of housing on Amersham Common, now better known as Amersham-on-the-Hill; as Ted grew older, he and his brother were often found 'inspecting' works on Orchard Lane and Mitchell Walk.

During WWII the majority of the sawmill had been requisitioned by HM Ministry of Defence for the storage of timber supplies used in aircraft con-

struction and other important war-work, all being directly delivered from London docks. The Museum premises itself is a remnant of wartime construction: a simple pole-barn ★ that has undergone extensive upgrade works during the subsequent years! Once hostilities had come to a close, and with post-war material shortages, the sawmill supported Chesham wood ware trades by focusing on production of brush handles and other goods.

In the 1950s HM Government restrictions meant that the continuation of the sawmill, brickworks and construction business of Albert Reed had to be reorganised and, under the direction of Ted and his brother Len, the site at 28 Plantation Road gradually became the industrial estate it is today.



## Building an Interest

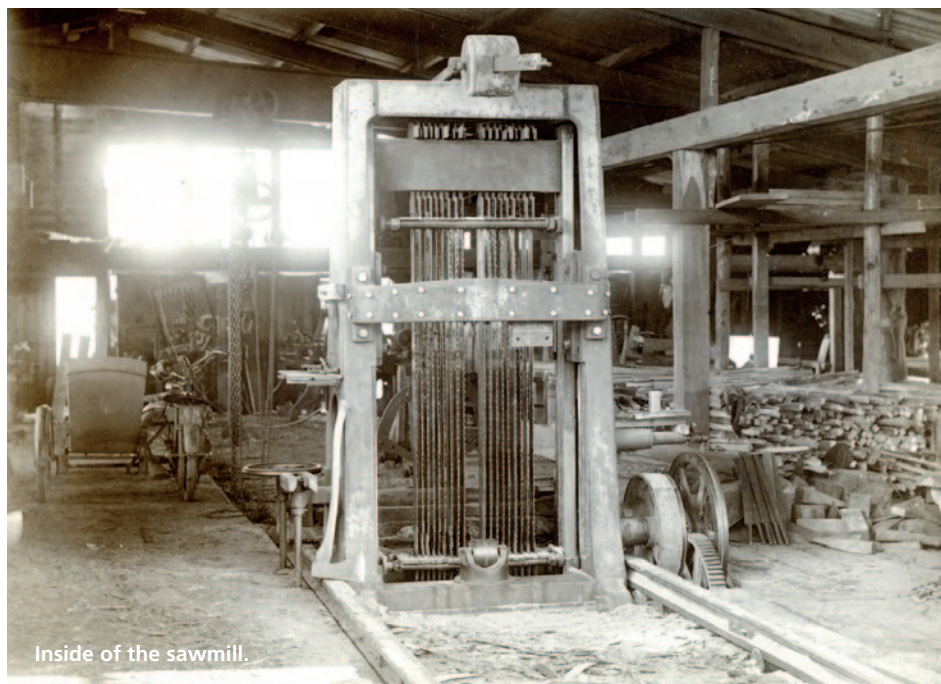
Following the passing of Albert & Clara in the 1960s Ted was encouraged, by friends and family, to take up an interest to occupy his time; a cursory glance through Exchange & Mart swiftly brought steam engines, fairground equipment and mechanical organs to his attention, many of which were perilously close to the scrap-heap! This was the pivotal moment that set a course for the next 60 years. Ted became a highly respected individual in the field of preservation, being a founder member of the Chiltern Traction Engine Club and stalwart supporter of the Fair Organ Preservation Society, amongst other pursuits.

### So, what is a fairground organ?

Mechanical 'fairground' organs were

used by travelling amusement proprietors at the turn of the 20th century in order to provide music for their rides. These instruments work on the same principle as the pipe organ found within churches, with pressurised air being passed through actions and pipework, thus creating the sound. Instead of being played by means of an organist at a keyboard, the organs 'read' a perforated cardboard book, paper roll or pinned cylinder which is then communicated to the action in the usual way.

Unfortunately, mechanical organs fell out of favour in the 1930s when low-cost amplified records became available; many instruments were simply destroyed or salvaged for parts. Thankfully some survived into preservation.



Inside of the sawmill.

## The Amersham Fair Organ Museum

Having built-up a small collection of instruments throughout the 1960s Ted was able to present many of these at local and national heritage events. Steam rallies and shows were only in the summer months, however, and it wasn't long before Mr. Reed followed the long tradition organ owners had of 'Sunday gatherings' during the winter months at the site in Plantation Road. It could be said that these informal gatherings were the birth of the Amersham Fair Organ Museum. Fast forward all these years and our regular series of open days still follow this pattern – for the very same reason.

With his UK-wide reputation for preserving and presenting organs in a faultless manner, it's no surprise that Ted managed to build what is now regarded as one of the premiere collections of mechanical organs in the country, if not the globe. A wide cross-section of instruments is on display, which document the complete development of the mechanical organ through the 19th & 20th centuries. Unique, and most notable to Amersham residents, will be a small Limonaire organ acquired in 1986 which was a staple of Amersham Charter Fair in Harvey & Saunders' juvenile ride. Even a devastating fire at the Museum building in 1991 did not detract from Ted's interest, with him carefully restoring the collection in just a few years.

With his 80th birthday fast approaching, and wishing to safeguard the future of this important collection, Ted bequeathed the instruments, music, Museum building and land to the nation in 2004 by forming the Amersham Fair Organ Museum Trust (registered charity number 1102001). He remained a staunch supporter, and Chairman, of the collection until the end, enjoying the melodies of yesteryear just days before his passing in December 2022. His vision continues today, with the Trustees continuing his pioneering work for the benefit of the public. The Museum's faithful pole-barn<sup>★</sup> continues to be developed, with new purposes-built toilet and kitchen facilities planned for completion in summer 2025.



Limonaire organ - tucked away in the middle of the round-a-bout.

The collection boasts strong bonds with its half-dozen or so sister-establishments in the UK, and other affiliated organisations abroad – having exhibited its instruments from London through to the Black Forest in Germany.



Gavioli organ c. 1906.

## 2025 Open Days

You can experience the collection in the most immersive way possible – through music! Open from 11:00 – 17:00, our open days feature all instruments, which play in 20-30 minute rotation. Admission is free but you can support the important work of the Trust by purchasing refreshments at our tea room and stocking-up in our gift shop.

We also conduct private tours of the collection and venue hire in order to subsidise free entry during the winter months – please get in touch for further details.

For full information and contact details please visit our website: [afom.org.uk](https://afom.org.uk)

We look forward to welcoming you to the collection soon!

**Benjamin Ely**

**Our 2025 open days are as follows:**  
**12th January 9th February 9th March**  
**6th April 2nd November 7th December**

★ Pole-barn: A quick, simple and economical method of constructing an agricultural barn. It is one that has no foundations and, in this instance, originally used unwanted telegraph poles (subsequently replaced with bricks) buried into the ground as supports for corrugated iron sides and roof.



In his article on the history of Methodism in Amersham (Newsletter, September 2024) James Patterson wrote of his sadness at the closure of St. John's church in Amersham-on-the-Hill. However he was heartened that the building had been purchased by Restore Hope who will be giving it a new lease of life with exciting plans to use it to extend their outreach community work.

In this article, Caroline Sence, the charity's Development Director, explains its ethos which regrettably compliments the work of, amongst other charities in this "wealthy" area of England, The Chiltern Foodbank (see our Newsletter, May 2024).



Locals may remember the farm for its trout fishery and shop. The eight acre lake is fed by a chalk stream, the River Chess, and sits within 360 acres of grassland, woods and pasture, a precious and unique environment for the charity's work with families and youngsters. For many of our visitors, the chance to enjoy the country-side is a rare treat. Be it pond-dipping and wading through a river, or scrambling over logs, joining in a bug-hunt or picnicking in the shade of an oak tree, these experiences for children and their parents build life-long memories.

Over these past two decades, the work of Restore Hope has developed and expanded and now has a staff team of eighteen, running numerous courses onsite to cover parenting, family relationships, preparation for the workplace and practical skills. Our clients are local families, and interestingly we are now seeing the children of our original cohort of parents coming along to activities and classes. It is heartening to hear the difference our intervention has made to the ambitions and outcomes for their children. The charity works with varied clients - including local schools and groups of young people with special needs, who visit weekly to assist in the cultivation of vegetables or animal husbandry.



Restore Hope was founded in 2002, acquiring Latimer Park farm with a vision to serve the local community.

Our work would not be possible without a loyal band of volunteers. Their tasks can range from providing hospitality for groups attending courses, to working on the land to maintain the estate. A small collection of animals onsite provide a useful diversion for children who visit - sometimes it's hard to keep in mind that families who live in high rise flats have little opportunity to experience the wonderful countryside we have on our doorstep.

Our volunteers, many of whom give of their time weekly, now number close on 200. It is amazing to discover the skills and talents that people bring.

We are thrilled that, In November 2024, the volunteers of Restore Hope

received **The King's Award for Voluntary Service**. This is the highest award a local voluntary group can receive in the UK, recognising the commitment of our volunteers.

Though the charity has grown, its heart is still for the local community, and the children, young people and families who live in this corner of the Chilterns. Restore Hope's mission is to support children, young people and families who are struggling in various areas of life, by positively impacting on their physical wellbeing, addressing mental health needs, facilitating the development of healthy relationships and increasing life and employability skills.

The charity is grateful to a number of local philanthropic organisations, including Heart of Bucks, the Rothschilds Foundation and the Clare Foundation. There are also individuals and businesses in the community who support the charity through one-off and monthly gifts. We also benefit from the support of Amersham and Chesham Community Boards and Buckinghamshire's Helping Hand fund, and our own in-house events such as the annual fireworks evening.

The present economic climate means that it is ever more difficult to raise the funds needed to continue and expand our work, and we - as many other charities - are mindful of this financial pressure as we plan for the future. Charitable funding enables Restore Hope to deliver FoodLife, which provides boxes of fresh fruit and vegetables to local families who struggle to afford nutritious food for their children. A proportion of the seasonal produce is grown on our land, tended and harvested by youngsters with additional needs - from schools such as Stony Dean, Alfriston and Pebble Brook. Fresh eggs are provided seasonally, with thanks to a flock of over 100 hens who live at Latimer Park.

Restore Hope has a heart for parents, especially those with children in the early years. Through parenting courses and weekly play groups, drop-in sessions and celebration events, we sustain positive impact over the long term. The regular input from our volunteers means there is continuity in those who welcome our clients week on week.

Restore Hope has recently successfully purchased St John's church, Woodside Road, Amersham, and been granted planning permission for the development

of the site. It is due to open in the latter part of next year. A major refurbishment of the building is planned, whilst retaining the character and benefits of the original architecture. We are pleased to carry on the purpose for which the church was built - for the benefit and enrichment of the local community.

The charity believes this second site will provide a totally different environment for our work, bringing the courses and opportunities for personal development into the centre of the town whilst Latimer Park will continue to offer the unique experience of open spaces and countryside activities. The two sites, overseen by our CEO Nate Sence, will work hand in hand to provide an expanded range of community facilities.

In spite of the privileges available to many in the area, Chesham and Amersham are known for entrenched pockets of deprivation and wealth disparity. Surprisingly, several years ago the local area was identified by the Government as one of the worst areas nationally for social mobility. In spite of the myriad resources available locally, including high quality education, high ratings of health and wellbeing and low criminality, children born into poverty are likely to remain in poverty through adulthood, and across generations. The hope of the charity is that more families and young people can be helped in breaking out of the cycle of generational disadvantage.

Over these past 20 years, Restore Hope has become integral in local work amongst families, earning the respect of Buckinghamshire Council, community groups and other charities. Through Restore Hope Amersham, which is





centrally based and easily accessible, it will be possible to respond more fully to local needs, partnering with established organisations to deliver specialist support, ultimately generating change at grass roots level to disrupt cycles of poverty and bring families the opportunities they deserve.

Restore Hope undertook a consultation with the local community from January to July 2024 to (1) better understand the needs, (2) identify the breadth of local provision, and (3) understand the gap between needs and provision. Restore Hope met with over 50 professionals, service providers, church leaders, council members, local authority representatives and more than 25 families; participated in 9 different working groups; receiving 120+ responses to a public survey; welcomed 300+ local residents to

St John's for the public consultation and held 3 events to consult specifically with young people. The consultation highlighted five main areas where there is a mismatch between local need and available provision to address the need: family support, mental health and wellbeing, advice and guidance, youth provision and food insecurity.

Many local families in need of support services face barriers to their voice being heard - lack of finance to attend group sessions and long referral waiting times being obvious examples. This leaves parents unable and/or unsure where to seek help. It is our hope that at Restore Hope Amersham, families will be able to access support for children from birth, especially in the area of children with additional needs. Partnerships with

organisations offering high levels of expertise will be crucial. Likewise our consultations highlighted a growing level of concern amongst local professionals, families and young people with regard to poor mental health. There seems to be more need than available provision, and very little joined up support to tackle the many factors that contribute. It is our hope that Restore Hope Amersham, through partnerships with experts in the field, will offer evidenced-based mental health support that is holistic and promotes wellbeing.

Disability Support, Healthy Start Vouchers and Job Seekers Allowance can make a meaningful difference to local residents - but changing policies and guidelines mean that some people aren't able to access the right support as a result of changes to personal circumstances or government policy. At Restore Hope Amersham, people will be offered access to advice from experts who are skilled in navigating a changing benefits landscape.

Our consultation found that local young people, without access to paid-for, after-school activities, have very little to occupy their time when the school day ends. A recent survey of youth in Buckinghamshire found that nearly 1 in 4 young people in Bucks report self-harming; more than 1 in 5 report having taken an overdose and 9 in 10 never or rarely tell anyone. At Restore Hope Amersham it is our plan that young people will have a place to call their own, with trusted and skilled advisors to offer support and guidance.

Food insecurity is not just experienced by those at the margins of society. Increases in the cost of living mean that many people locally are struggling to

provide enough food for their households. At Restore Hope Amersham, local residents will be supported to access healthy and affordable food, and offered courses to improve budgeting and cookery skills.

Now that planning permission has been received, Restore Hope has put the building project out to tender with the intention to commence redevelopment of the site from Spring 2025.

Restore Hope's CEO, Nate Sence, says *"We are ambitious in our plans for Restore Hope, with a site in Latimer as well as this new site in Amersham, because we are ambitious for everyone living in our community. We believe everyone should have the opportunity to overcome disadvantage and thrive, and we believe that Restore Hope has an important role to play in this community-level transformation."*

This is a new era in the life of Restore Hope and we are thrilled and excited to extend the work of the charity into the centre of a community. We believe we have the skills and experience to make a difference in the lives and futures of families who are struggling.

To learn more about Restore Hope, or to consider how you might become a volunteer, please visit [www.restorehopelatimer.org](http://www.restorehopelatimer.org), where you can also read more about the consultation and developing plans for Restore Hope Amersham. The capital campaign for Restore Hope Amersham launched in November 2024. We would be delighted to hear from people who are encouraged by our work and feel able to support us financially. If you would like to find out more, please visit <https://restorehopecommunityhub.org>.

**Caroline Sence**

# What are these Small Holes?



In September's issue, Clare Atkinson wrote about the origins of Dr Challoner's Grammar school. As a follow up, here is a piece of related historical trivia, with thanks to the Amersham Museum.

You've probably never even noticed them, small dark conical holes in the brickwork on either side of the door outside the site of the original Dr Challoner's school, but if you have perhaps you've wondered what made them. They are believed to have been created by boys sharpening their pencils before going into school.

Pupils were often asked to bring a dampened cloth or sponge to school so that they could clean their slates in preparation for their next assignment and this is the origin of the phrase 'to wipe the slate clean'.



*(The door to the original Dr Challoner's school).*



I was delighted to receive a 'phone call from one of our members, Peter King, who had just read Clare Atkinson's article on the first 400 years of Dr Challoner's Grammar school. He called to tell me of his family's connection to the school – not only was his father educated there, but so too were three of his four uncles and aunt (yes, contemporary records show she attended from 1915 to 1921) – plus his two sons. And whilst talking to Peter it became clear that his father was a very active Amersham citizen.

## FRANCIS “REX” KING

Francis, who was always known as Rex, was born in Chelsea in 1901, but moved to Chesham Bois in early childhood, remaining there for the rest of his life. He died in 1982.

Rex's dates at Dr Challoner's are unfortunately lost. Clare Atkinson was able to discover the attendance records of four of his siblings but not Rex's, however Peter has found two of his school reports dated July 1917 and 1918, so he was there during WWI. After leaving school he practiced accountancy in London with his father before setting up his own Accountancy Practice with his younger brother here in Amersham. His connection with Dr Challoner's resumed when he became a governor and finally Chairman of Governors in 1970.



During WWII Rex was a Captain in the 11th Battalion of the Bucks Home Guard (based in Amersham) from 1940 to 1944 – one of 970 volunteers according to a letter, dated 1941, held by Amersham Museum. After the war he became a member of the Old Amersham Rural District Council (1946 – 1961), a Chesham Bois Parish councillor from 1946 and served on the County Council (1961 – 1974). He had a long association with 1st Chesham Bois Scout Group, and served as Assistant County Scout Commissioner from 1938 to 1967. He was a founder member of the Amersham Rotary Club in 1946 (along with his Home Guard commander, Lt.-Col. Marston) and founder member and President of the Amersham Community Centre in 1953. He was awarded the MBE in 1953 and in 1960 became a Freeman of the City of London.

Bucks Home Guard,  
Rex is in the front row,  
second from the right.

# What's in a name?



Two roads, almost opposite to one-another, feed into Station Road near its southern end; Highover Park on the east side and Ruckles Way, from the west. The reason for many road names is immediately apparent, “Station” Road for instance, but what are the origins of these two?

## Highover Park

Ironically the name, now very much associated with Amersham, has no connection to Amersham.

In 1929 Bernard Ashmole and his wife, Dorothy, purchased a 16 acre hill top plot of land, running down to Station Road, from the Tyrwhitt-Drake Estate. They then commissioned Amyas Connell to design the now iconic Modernist Grade II\* listed house – which was completed in 1931. It was Dorothy who named the house “High & Over”, after a hill in the South Downs affording stunning views well known to her family.

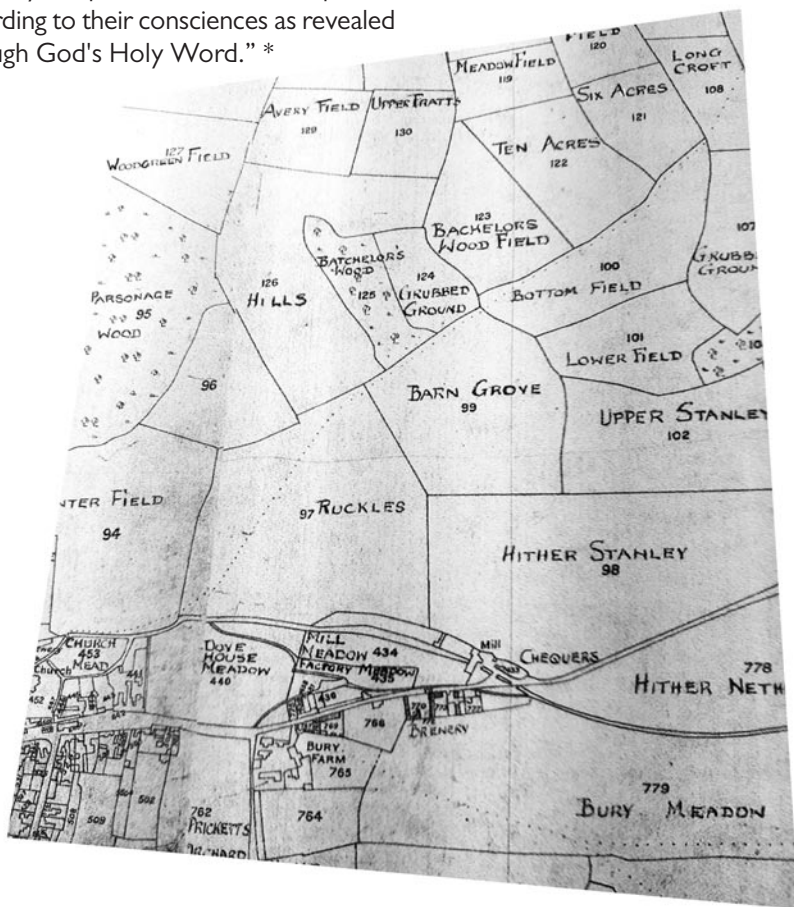
To recoup some of the money spent on the construction of his new house, Bernard built the four Sun Houses, also designed by Amyas Connell, along what was the driveway – completed in 1934 and now Grade II listed. In the 1950s the remaining land was sold for housing and developed over the subsequent years. The driveway became the road, Highover Park – a corruption of the name given to the architectural gem by Dorothy Ashmole.

## Ruckles Way

The road was developed between the late 1970s and early 1980s and takes its name from the field on which it was built: Ruckles. A local map dated 1838 clearly shows the large field, which also holds a piece of Amersham history; it is where the martyrs were burnt to death in 1506 and 1521 for “the principles of religious liberty. For the right to read and interpret the Holy Scriptures and to worship God according to their consciences as revealed through God's Holy Word.” \*

As to how the field came to be named is open to conjecture. One meaning of the word is wrinkles or creases, so it could (not unreasonably) indicate the state of the ground, or perhaps it was the name of an early yeoman farmer on the land.

It's interesting to note how many of the field names on the map are still in use today. But you won't see Station Road - it was not constructed till 1892.



\* Part of the inscription on the Martyrs' Memorial, erected a short distance from the funeral pyre, by the Protestant Alliance in 1931.

With thanks to Alison Bailey and Amersham Museum for providing the historical detail and map.



# 50 Years Ago

## A walk around the Old Town



The Council of Europe declared 1975 *"European Architectural Year"*. Every European country was asked to make the public more aware of the irreplaceable cultural, social and economic values represented by their historic monuments, groups of old buildings and interesting sites in both town and country.



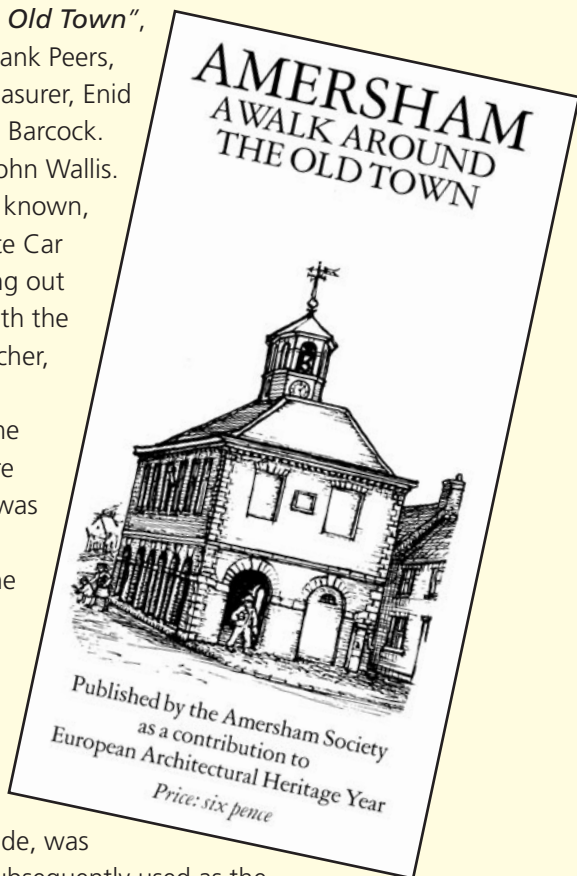
The Society's then chairman, Eric Corns, felt it was important that we should participate in this event by celebrating our heritage, although *"we didn't have the money or members to do a large project involving buildings"*. The result was a leaflet printed in 1975:

*"Amersham – A walk around the Old Town"*, written by the Society's Secretary, Frank Peers, with illustrations by the Society's Treasurer, Enid Butcher, and a map drawn by Lorna Barcock. The overall design was laid out by John Wallis.

The Old Town trail as it became known, guides the walker from the Dovecote Car Park around Old Amersham, pointing out buildings of historical interest, all with the charming line drawings by Enid Butcher, ending up at the Market Hall *★*.

3,000 leaflets were printed at the cost of "a little over £100" and were sold for just 6d each! The wording was subsequently revised in a second edition printed in 1992 "in aid of the Amersham Museum", and a third edition, incorporating details of the museum (set up in 1991) was printed in 1998, by which time the retail price had gone up to 30p.

*★* Enid Butcher's drawing of the Market Hall, on the cover of the guide, was adopted as the Society's logo and subsequently used as the cover piece on our Programme of Events cards during the 1970s, 80s and 90s (as well as on many of our newsletters). The drawing is now incorporated in our new banner. The Market Hall is also important to the Society as it is where many events were held including exhibitions, lectures, celebrations and fund-raising appeals.





# MAN ON THE SPOT

Bill Hamilton

Perhaps because we take the daily news for granted, it was especially interesting to hear from Bill Hamilton and how for all his working life he had gone out collecting it for us, along with the vista of illustrations of where he had been.

He painted a picture of life today, contrasting the daily life of so many people – supposedly connected by their mobile phones but actually separated from each other, whether in cafes or on station platforms. We looked at his picture of some girls in an art gallery, seemingly ignoring the art. But, Bill suggested, they might be using their phones to contribute to the experience? He contrasted this with the Pitman shorthand notes of his younger days (something even male reporters had had to learn!) and making reports on the old-fashioned typewriters with Tipp-Ex correction tape; now on laptops and PCs – but still the QWERTY keyboard!

He started his career in Dundee as a trainee journalist on the Fife Herald. This was where the 1879 gale had torn down the huge river Tay Railway Bridge, killing all the passengers; the locomotive was salvaged, but never driven again over the infamous bridge.

He illustrated the fame of Dundee by referencing the three J's – Jute, Jam and Journalism. Apparently one third of the European raspberry jam production is made in Dundee, and it's where Jimmy Keiller became famous for the mar-malade he made from the oranges salvaged from a Spanish ship wreck. At that time the Jute factory kept some 30,000 Irish girls in work in difficult and dangerous conditions. And many famous comics were printed in Dundee, not least his beloved Beano.

Bill's description of his education was summarised by initially being impressed by, but later dismayed when he learned exactly what all the red "kisses" in his exercise book meant! His first job as a reporter was to attend council meetings in all the local towns, travelling by bus, recording the minutiae of local life. He felt that the grouping of these towns under changes made by Edward Heath diminished local civic pride. It was difficult to compare his wage of £5.10.0 a week with prices today.

He then moved to Hartlepool to work for the Northern Daily Mail. This was when it was still a coal mining area and huge tankers, dwarfing the workers terraced cottages, were being built at

Swan Hunter in nearby Wallsend. In Dundee he was Scotland's youngest football referee and a keen sportsman. In Hartlepool he was the sports reporter, so was well placed to comment on all the local football matches. This was in the days when papers had pink and green sporting supplements, and he described in some detail the tedious process of finding a telephone box and calling in his report to start the laborious process of print setting to meet the production deadline.



Editing video stories abroad to meet tight deadlines.

His next career move was into regional television, Tyne Tees TV. He found news reading challenging with the prospect of a 1.5 million audience; he was given some wise advice, he should imagine speaking to just the one person to calm his nerves – perhaps the most beautiful girl in the world ..... Sophia Loren!

At that time, all BBC regional TV reporters were sent, in turn, to London, as part of their training. In 1979 Bill was chosen to be the first. This gave him an opportunity to meet the famous

names of the time, such as Richard Baker and Angela Rippon. Nothing notable happened until his second to last day when Jim Callaghan lost a motion of no confidence by one vote and had to call a General Election.

After a dash to Portsmouth to report on a chess match, he was parking in the House of Commons when Airey Neave's car was blown up by the IRA so he was truly 'on the spot', being the first reporter at this tragic event. He later reported on the subsequent events – the Brixton riots and the Brighton bomb which almost blew up Margaret Thatcher at the Conservative Party Conference. He then reflected on the instigators of these atrocities and how they were able to study whilst in prison. For example Martina Anderson originally gaoled for life, but who was released after 13 years with a first class Honours Degree in Social Sciences; she became a spokesperson for the IRA and a member of the European Parliament.

Margaret Thatcher said that every prime minister needs 'A Willy' referring to Willy Whitelaw, her deputy and also Home Secretary. His background in the army led him to decide that to resolve the problems in prisons and of street vandalism, we should adopt the US idea of Boot camps, to keep prisoners occupied and too tired to commit misdemeanours. The Short Sharp Shock, as it was known, merely led to fitter and healthier prisoners, but not to the rehabilitation he might have intended.





Interviewing the President of Uganda,  
Yoweri Museveni.

His career then took him to some harrowing assignments: he saw the results of the 1980 El Asnam earthquake in Algeria with its streets of collapsed flats and homeless people. He reported on the distribution of aid to the tragic AIDS orphans in Uganda. In an echo of current times, he was in the UN buffer zone as shells and missiles flew between the Israelis and the PLO in Lebanon when Ariel Sharon sent tanks to Beirut. And he saw the civil conflict in Mozambique which sent so many refugees to Zimbabwe. But on a lighter note he did become friends with the founding father of Zambia, former President Kenneth Kaunda who he was able to reach directly by a number from his phone book!

Bill gave us a detailed picture of the time he spent with King Sobhuza of Swaziland, later known as Eswatini, where a huge sugar refinery was planned. The King had a hundred wives, 267 children and at least 1,000 grandchildren. During the visit Bill was jostled by men with rifles and was not allowed to take photos, as this might have taken the wives personalities onto the celluloid. The King had a luxuriously appointed jet aircraft and ordered a white Rolls Royce and chauffeur for each of his wives and 150 BMW's for his staff.



Children incarcerated in homes  
without proper food or care.

As the first western television crew into Albania, Bill faced his darkest times. Enver Hoxha had converted Albania into a repressive one-party State, where atheism was enforced. All who opposed him were imprisoned or executed; people were desperate to escape and pictures of figures clinging to departing ships were frightening. Reporters recorded the terrible state of children incarcerated in homes without

As Aids took a dreadful toll of human life in Uganda and Southern Africa, we found little children sent out to toil in the fields.

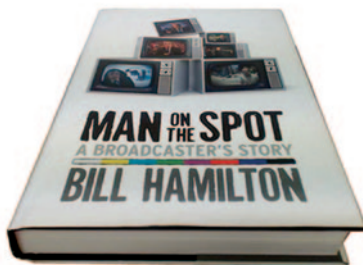


proper food or care - the shortage of medical equipment forced six babies to be put in one incubator. Indeed the descriptions were so horrific; they were only shown in small clips each night on the television news in the UK.

Various people came from outside to try to help. The Duchess of York, Sarah Ferguson, rolled up her sleeves and was much appreciated. Norman Wisdom was a popular figure in Albania, as so many of his films had not been axed by the censor. Most surprising of all was Bill's meeting with Mother Teresa who few remember was born in Albania. She told him that it didn't matter how much you give or what you did, it is giving love which makes the difference. However, the countryside remains very poor and backward with children having to walk 5 km to school. Bill left Albania from the newly named 'Airport Nënë Tereza' in respect for its most distinguished citizen.

Bill retired from the BBC in 1966 and lives nearby in St. Albans, but continued to work as a freelance broadcaster and journalist. He has been involved in filming assignments for a range of children's charities in Albania, Uganda and Kazakhstan. From money earned by giving talks on journalism and broadcasting he has been able to raise sufficient funds to rebuild a dilapidated country school 3,000 feet up in the Albanian mountains.

**"Man on the Spot"**  
is the title of Bill's autobiography



**Christine Standing**

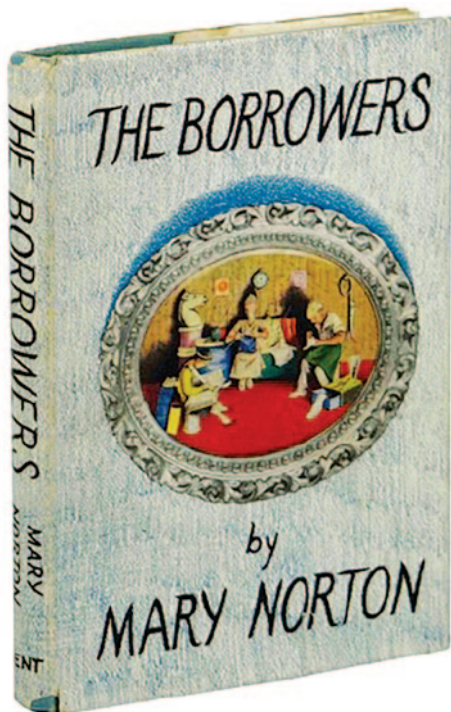
# Arrietty's Diary

a talk by Irving Finkel

When Sir John Reith became the first Managing Director and later the first Director General of the BBC in the 1920s he famously mandated that its role as a public service broadcaster was to educate, inform and entertain.

On a cold and stormy November night around 50 members of the Amersham Society were educated, informed and entertained by Edward Copisarow's friend Irving Finkel, who is both an Assyriologist at the British Museum as well as a founder of the Great Diary Project\*.

His talk was titled Arrietty's Diary, but this was really an excuse to welcome us into the world of the obsessive collector of the rare, curious and interesting. Many of us who started reading in the 1950s and 1960s were introduced to the world of imaginative fiction by Mary Norton and her five books about the Borrowers, small people who lived beneath the floorboards of a large house and 'borrowed' all they needed from the conventional family living above the floorboards.





The youngest borrower is 14 year old Arrietty who both records her life in her own diaries and owns a collection of miniature diaries in a custom bookcase. This habit of both reading and writing struck a chord with a younger Irving, and set him on the path of researching and buying miniature printed books, mostly published in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Irving identified that the serious collector must possess a combination of knowledge of his collected material, passion (possibly obsession?) for his subject, and a deep enough pocket to scare away competitors at auctions and sales.

He finished with an appeal for any of us with inherited diaries to consider donating them to the Great Diary Project.

**Barney Tyrwhitt-Drake**

★ The Great Diary Project was launched in 2007 by two diary devotees, Dr Irving Finkel and Dr Polly North. In 2009, the project was fortunate to find its permanent home, at Bishopsgate Institute. The project rescues, archives and makes publicly available a growing collection of more than 19,000 unpublished diaries. It is the largest collection of its kind in Europe.



# Artists Want the Vote!

## Exploring suffragism and art in Amersham and the surrounding area

Here at Amersham Museum, we are already getting excited about 2028 when we will be celebrating the centenary of women and men being given equal voting rights. In 2018, Amersham Museum marked the centenary of the First World War with the publication of a book *Women at War* written by museum trustee and local historian Alison Bailey. This project was supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and shared the stories of local women who supported suffrage campaigns and contributed to the war effort.



Earlier this year, to research this area of history further, we applied for and were awarded a research and development grant by the Weston Loan Programme with Art Fund. The funding is for a 12-month research project which will also scope a potential temporary exhibition, tentatively titled 'Artists want the vote!' to be held in 2027/28. The project will bring together the

stories of local artists who were also activists in the sphere of women's rights to coincide with the centenary of the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act of 1928.

The grant includes funding for staff time to devote to research, including one of our youngest museum volunteers, Millie Winter, who is researching the museum's suffrage collection, specifically the Chiltern Club of Arts collection. As a recent history graduate it is also valuable work experience for her. The museum holds the complete archive of the Chiltern Club of Arts and Handicrafts, founded by celebrity portrait painter, and suffrage campaigner Louise Jopling in 1919. Many of the early members were active suffrage campaigners but interestingly the leader of the local Anti-Suffrage League, Lady Susan Truman was also one of the founding members!

The Amersham area was a hotbed of support for the campaign for Votes for Women in the early twentieth century. This support was entwined with the development of the artistic community, with noted women activist artists living and working locally, participating politically, and organising themselves to make their voices heard. Artists such as Louise Jopling, Mary Dering Curtois and Catherine Courtauld, who lived in Chesham Bois, Little Missenden and Great Missenden respectively, were members of different suffrage groups including the Artists League, the Suffrage Atelier and the Mid-Bucks Suffrage Society. They used their artistic talents to further the cause by holding fundraising exhibitions and creating banners and propaganda posters. Not all our local activists were women: Black Friday by Amersham artist William Monk, in the Museum of London's collection, depicts the day in 1910 when 300 angry suffragettes rioted outside the Houses of Parliament and were savagely beaten by police and an angry mob.

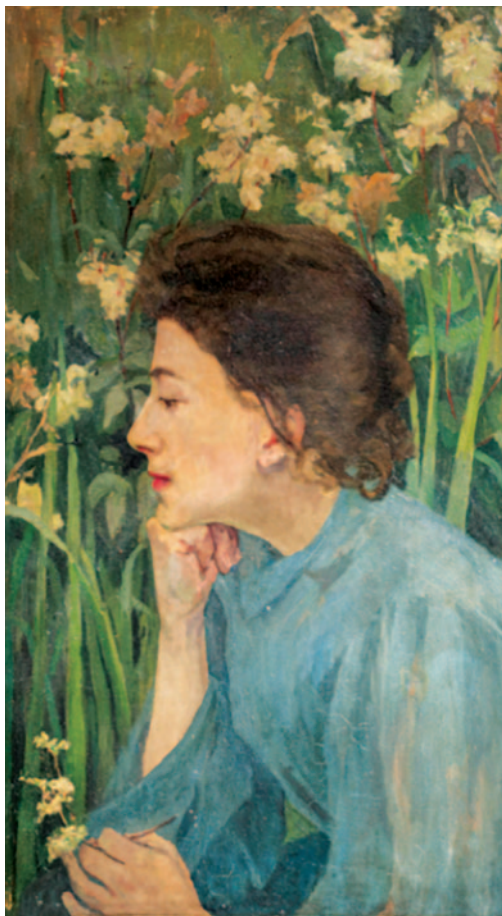
Black Friday  
by William Monk.



In 2023, the Museum acquired its first work by Mary Dering Curtois, a small impressionistic landscape titled 'Hayricks.' This was purchased with the support of the Arts Council England/V&A Purchase Grant Fund after 50% of the funding was secured by the Friends of Amersham Museum and the Amersham Society. Publicity about this acquisition led to Belgian art dealer, Bert Nordin, offering to sell another work by Curtois which he had acquired from a house sale in Belgium. This portrait of a pensive young woman in a garden is a much larger work with a distinctly contrasting style and subject. In October of this year the painting was purchased with the support again of the Friends, the Amersham Society and the ACE/VA Purchase Fund. It is now being restored and reframed. However, we hold very few other artworks or objects in our collections that relate to this theme.

Although Amersham Museum has presented some of this history via talks, publications and on its website, this project aims to explore in more depth and through other collections, such as the Women's Library and the Museum of London, in order to place the local story in national context. We also want to extend our research beyond the visual arts to look at writers, poets, actors and musicians, as well as research the local suffrage movement between 1918 and 1928.

Building on our current outreach programme, and particularly on our recent 'A New View' project, we would like to explore the contemporary resonances of these campaigning women with local young people, artists and women's groups such as local branches of the Women's Institute, as this was founded with a strong connection to the suffrage movement.



Pensive young woman  
by Mary Dering Curtois.

Our recent consultations with local young people and early career freelance artists have revealed that both feel isolated, identifying a lack of opportunities to network and feel part of a community. Through exploration of these historical experiences, we would aim to inspire current participants to work with us to develop outcomes from the research that are meaningful to them and their lives today. The vibrancy of the research topic is also key to our project, both for the staff and volunteers who are passionate about the theme, but also for our audience development ambitions. Our current visitor data shows that we could do more to attract a younger demographic, and we plan to use this theme as a means of doing so, building through the project on consultation with potential participants or co-curators in a future exhibition and accompanying programme.

As a local history museum, our exhibition programme aims to counter the stereotype that this excludes artworks, with the ambition that visitors will be attracted by the opportunity to see art as part of the local history. This project enables us to continue this trajectory.

Finally, 'A New View' has also enabled us to upgrade our temporary exhibition gallery in terms of security and environmental control as well as display potential. We secured our first ever loan from a national museum (Tate) for the Precious Objects exhibition and are keen to continue to consider loans from national and major lending institutions in our future exhibition programme. The project grant includes funding for travel expenses for members of the Museum team to carry out research at other institutions, and to meet with staff at museums and galleries with related collections or paintings, to better share information and to potentially lay the groundwork for loans for an exhibition in Amersham to mark the centenary in 2028.

If you would be interested in helping with the project, please contact us via [info@amershammuseum.org](mailto:info@amershammuseum.org).

Thank you!



# What's on at Amersham Museum in 2025?

Although the Museum is closed until 1 March 2025, we are certainly not hibernating. While we are closed to general visitors, we are planning exhibitions, applying for grants, researching Amersham's history, re-organising storage areas, devising sessions for schools, cataloguing collections, cleaning our displays, maintaining our buildings, refreshing our website, welcoming school and community groups, training new volunteers, writing new guided walks, and choosing new stock for our shop.

## Temporary Exhibition

When we re-open, we will have a new exhibition in our Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Gallery that explores the relationship between Amersham and the surrounding countryside. Amersham has, of course, been a settlement for hundreds of years, with this relationship key to its identity. The shape of the land has been formed over these centuries by local people and livestock from paths and holloways, to grand landscapes created to please local landowners, such as at Shardeloes. Farming means fields, hedges and also markets, footpaths mean drovers or rambles, and the landscape inspires marketeers and artists alike.

The surrounding land also provides raw materials for building: bricks, flint and wood; for furniture: wood and rushes; for cottage industries: straw and clay; and for larger scale industry such as beer using water and barley. Butchers, milkmen, and



watercress growers alike also have a place in local history. And in recent decades 'escaping to the country' has gained momentum, from the early days of Metro-land, wartime evacuees and emigres, to today's commuters to London.

Working with our Young Curators, our reminiscence groups, and with input from local farmers, we will select objects and artworks from the Museum's collections to explore these stories, and to reflect on their resonance with current concerns and practices.



## Garden Exhibition

We will also add a new layer of interpretation to our beautiful herb garden. Keeping the information about historical uses in place, we are introducing some additional labels during 2025 to highlight the uses of some of the plants in modern medicine. From foxgloves to periwinkle, meadowsweet to milk thistle, visitors will be able to appreciate the role that these plants have had in current treatments.

## Activities and Events

Alongside our popular regular reminiscence and singing session, Art Club and Young Curators, we will be running a talks programme including Helen Fry speaking on Women in Intelligence to mark the 80th anniversary of VE Day.

We're also looking forward to working with Bucks Berks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) on a new project to enthuse young people about the connections between local nature and heritage. This builds on workshops we ran in 2024 with Wild Amersham, a group we'll be working with again in 2025.



# Chapter Two Community Bookshop

For the past six years, after the business of the Amersham Society's A G M has been completed and the committee elected, we have invited a member of a local charity to come to the Kings Chapel and tell us about their work. This year we chose as our charity The Hospice of St Francis. One of their imaginative fundraising initiatives is the Chapter Two Community Bookshop in Chesham High Street and we were delighted that its Manager, Mark Jackson-Hancock, could join us and relate the story of this amazing bookshop, which is open seven days a week thanks to a small staff and fifty-five volunteers.

Chapter Two Community Bookshop first opened six years ago. It started in a small way gradually developing into the large, busy, special shop that it is today; a shop that members of the local community feel is their own. All profits from the bookshop go to The Hospice of St Francis. Mark's job title is Manager for Reading and Wellbeing, and an important part of his work is to see potential in an idea and then to turn it into something that really works for the community.

The Hospice of St Francis in Berkhamsted was started by Pam MacPherson in 1979 to help and support not

only people with life-limiting illnesses, but also those with treatable conditions right through from early diagnosis, treatment to remission. Support is also given to their families and friends. At the start funding was limited and generated through donations and bequests; the Hospice now has an annual budget of six million pounds (including a small annual grant from the NHS) which has enabled it to provide a multitude of services for 33,000 people in the area. It's a wonderful example of how a small seed of an idea can be turned into something really special, something that touches the lives of so many.

Mark started his career in the book trade where he worked in the management teams at Waterstones and Foyles. But despite working for these well-known shops, he knew that he wanted a role that was more rewarding. This led him to work for a charity that provided books for those at sea and then onto The Hospice of St Francis. After his move to the Hospice an idea took hold: how to show people the benefits that books could bring to their lives, how the act of reading would create wellbeing almost by magic.

Huge numbers of books were being donated, more than the Hospice could cope with, so sadly many of them simply remained in stockrooms in their shops. Mark's first task was to visit the shops to value and to curate them into categories.

He then devised various ways of marketing them. The books that were a particularly good read were selected by the shops to be promoted following the principle "*Don't judge a book by its cover....judge it by its first sentence*". They were wrapped in plain brown paper with just the first line of the book's text printed on the front as a "*teaser*". Each book had already been read by a staff member or volunteer and they very quickly became popular purchases at £2.50 each.



They were wrapped in plain brown paper.

Some donated books were old, many were treasured possessions of families or individuals a few were very valuable. Among the donated books Mark came across was a first edition of Gray's Anatomy, 1780, which had been given to a doctor in the 1930s by a patient who could not afford to pay for his treatment. The doctor had kept this rare book for many years and, after his care at The hospice and eventual death, his widow had donated it to The hospice. The book was subsequently valued at £8,000.



There then came a point when Mark realised that to fully capitalise on the fundraising potential of book sales a dedicated shop was needed. A search was started and in 2018 the perfect building was found: No 10, High Street, Chesham. It had a large frontage with three big windows, the rent was reasonable, it was in a busy area of the town, it was spacious and there was a cow shed in the yard at the rear, marvellous for storage!

After a huge amount of work to convert the ex-toy shop, Chapter Two Community Bookshop finally opened in 2020. The shop's logo is an open book and importantly, during the renovation a prominent notice had been displayed



showing what was happening in the heart of Chesham .... here was to be a shop for the whole community.

But one week after the shop opened Covid struck and lockdown ensued! However staff and volunteers were able to continue to during this time, donned in white coats and wearing masks. They organised on-line book reading sessions, and story time for children. The shop survived and kept going.

There is a lovely atmosphere in the shop, where people are involved in activities beyond simply buying books. They run a subscription service with different books provided every three, six or twelve months. Books are also sold

on-line and by mail order. Finally there are Book Events for children and regular Author Events. For instance, Daniel Finkelstein, Member of the House of Lords, politician and journalist, was their guest on 6th November talking about his recent book, *"The Holocaust, Hitler, Stalin, Mum and Dad"*. Such events are extremely popular and raise a lot of money.

Parents are free to come in and simply read to their children, introducing them to the world of books. Any child then wanting to buy a book will find one very reasonably priced. They organise poetry reading sessions. A poetry competition was held in 2023 – which attracted a lot more interest than had anticipated – and inspired a lady to write a poem every day! There is a chess set laid out on a table and a coach on hand to help people learn and improve their game. There are also regular paper-craft workshops.

When Netflix planned their Bridgerton series, they wanted to film scenes set up in 19th century libraries full of books which look authentic. So they came to the Chapter Two to buy a lot of old books to use them in the background. Another time, when Netflix was working on Heartstopper series, they used the bookshop as a film set and paid for a whole day for it to be closed. Unfortunately the bookshop scene lasted only one minute and eleven seconds, but it was at least clearly recognisable as Chapter Two!



The eye catching Christmas window display for 2024.

The volunteers are incredibly creative and design the wonderful, eye catching, window displays often highlighting anniversaries such as Remembrance Sunday, Hallowe'en or "Hats Off" (referencing Chesham's historic role in hat-making). Chapter Two has even won a Chesham Society Award for the best shop window in the town.

A few weeks before Mark's visit the shop had to cope with another disaster, heavy rain in Chesham had flooded a number of shops in the High Street including Chapter Two. Staff and volunteers rallied round, bringing buckets, mops and brooms to help clean up. Four hundred books were waterlogged, but

the local paper took up the story and the next day a thousand books were donated to replace the damaged stock and Gavin Darvell of the local Darvell and Sons Bakery gave a particularly beautiful sketch of the shop he had drawn.

The motto of the shop is "*Your Precious Life*," a philosophy encouraging people to make the most of their lives. At the end of Mark's talk, it was clear that the evening had provided everyone with a lot to think about and we expect that those who had not visited Chapter Two would do so very soon and experience its wonderful magic.

**Dorothy Symes**

# Big Ring, small ring

By Marian Borrows

This is the second of two articles by Marion Borrows based on the life of Reg Mason. The first, "Growing up at the Eagle" was printed in our May 2024 edition.

I never tire of strolling around Old Amersham. Something I have not observed before always catches my attention and often puzzles me. Recently I discovered a document in the archives of Buckinghamshire Library that has answered some of my queries. This fascinating book "Some Amersham reflections 1895 to 1970" by R. J. Mason describes his experiences growing up in Amersham.

By the turn of the century most of the craftspeople had gone but there were plenty of shops to provide for the needs of the local population. The streets were busy with people, animals, carts and wagons. Children roamed freely in the surrounding woods and fields and played games in the streets. There were two distinct groups or gangs of children. Those whose parents worked for the Shardeletes estate and those who worked for the brewery. He hints at a

friendly rivalry between the two. As children still do today, he looked forward to the Charter Fair and Christmas. In 1901 he describes a Christmas party when each child received a new 6d coin, a bun, an orange and possible bag of sweets from the Drake family. The girls would curtsy and the boys



George Ward's shop on the corner of Whielden Street, 1889.

The annual Charter Fair, c.1925.



touch their forelock. Apparently, the grown-ups who lived in the Drake properties, still observed this courtesy when they met a member of the family in the town. The grown-ups looked forward to the Amersham horse races and ice-skating on Shardeloes Lake.

One image he describes will stay with me when I walk through the churchyard today. After the Sunday service, and to entertain the other children, incidentally all in their Sunday best, the choir boys would perform gymnastics on some of the graves because it was believed that if you jumped hard enough you could hear grunts from below!





Improving the road surface of the High Street, 1910.

The High Street was very dusty, potholes were constantly filled with broken flints. Most of the footpaths were cobbled and nicknamed the Denner ★ Hills after a local Chiltern stone. This made it easy for games of marbles to be played in the gaps. People swept and weeded their own fronts and applied Bath brick (grey colour) to their doorstep trims.

Cherry Lane is a reminder of the many cherry orchards that existed in Amersham. The author describes two types of cherries: whitehearts and the small black cherries. Pocket money could be earned by the children scaring the birds from the ripe fruit. They used a wooden clapper. At Town Farm (just the cottage now marks the site) when the cows had been milked in the evening, they would be walked across the road from the farmyard to drink in the Misbourne by Town Mill. The horses, too, because there was no piped water to the farmyard.

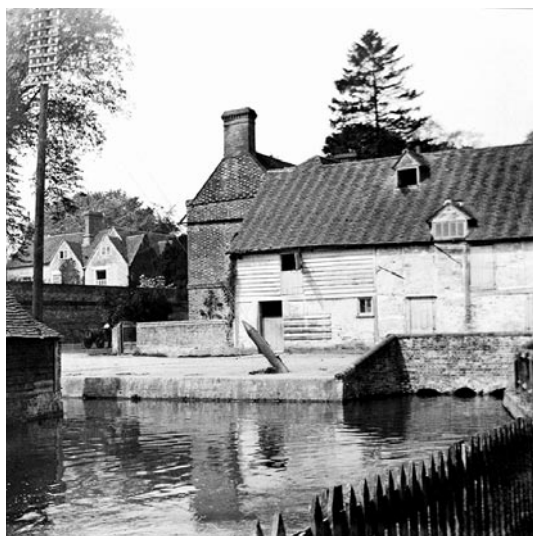
Twice a day the coach from Beaconsfield would collect and deliver mail in the post office, now the museum. Over the years water from the town pump, still in place by the Market Hall, was used by the local traders to clean their vehicles. It was also a great place for discussion and gossip. On Tuesdays of every week the market bell would be rung at noon. It was discontinued just before the 2nd World War because it was confused with the fire bell.

★ Denner stones, a very hard silica based stone resistant to erosion.

The author also remembers the stocks that stood by Gothe police cell. He returned to Amersham in the '70s and although he could not find them, he questioned an elderly resident. She confirmed they had existed and when she was a girl she had got in trouble with the constable because she had taken a drink to a miscreant who had been locked in the stocks.

Perhaps when one learns about the past it is the things that no longer exist that also stay vividly in the memory. For instance, the loss of the small sheds at the ends of gardens on the left hand side of the High Street. These were, of course, the outside lavatories and there is some speculation as to whether the waste contents were flushed into the Misbourne. At the turn of the century, when piped water and sewers were installed, the toilets moved indoors. Apparently how they were used died hard for there were few flushing systems and the custom was to just lift the manhole cover and tip. Old traditions die hard.

*[Some of us will have vivid memories of these garden conveniences. For those unsure of what I'm speaking, checkout the Museum garden.]*



Town Mill, c.1895.

The disappearance of the gas holders would have pleased the author because he considered them a blight on the historic town. Gas was supplied to the town from 1870 and was considered a great boon.

P.S. The title **big ring** and **small ring** describes the marble games that were played. If anyone has any memories of these games, please let me know via the newsletter editor. Likewise, any knowledge of the stocks. The name of the old lady whose cottage window faced the stocks was Ann.

**Marian Borrows**

# The Old Berkeley Hunt

## An Anecdotal History Part 1 From Earliest Times to 1862

The Hunting Act of 2004 which banned the hunting of most wild animals (notably foxes, deer, hares and mink) with dogs in England came into force 20 years ago on 18th February 2005. One hunt which was affected was the Old Berkeley which met regularly at Shardeloes and in Old Amersham on Boxing Day - a quintessential setting for an old tradition, which attracted huge crowds. Here, Richard Wheeler, now retired having worked for the National Trust on garden restoration for over 40 years, writes the first of two parts about the Hunt's history. Part two, bringing us up to the ending of fox hunting, will appear in our May newsletter.

This painting by Ben Marshall is of Tom Oldaker, huntsman of the Berkeley from 1782-1794, and then of the Old Berkeley until his death in 1831. He is pictured here with two of his best hounds Maleburn and Ramper. He famously hunted one fox from Scratch Wood, in Mill Hill to some rough ground in Kensington Gardens, where the fox, unsurprisingly, won the day.



The origins of the Old Berkeley Hunt date back through the mists of time to the eleventh century when Roger Berkeley was given manors in Gloucestershire by King William the Conqueror and Berkeley Castle was first built. Hounds have been kept there for centuries, first to hunt deer, and then following the increasing popularity of foxhunting in the latter part of the 18th century they became the Berkeley Foxhounds.

These hounds had a country that until 1806 ran across England from

Berkeley Castle to Kensington Gardens. They had three or four sets of kennels at Cranford, near the present day Heathrow (where the Berkeley family were Lords of the Manor from 1618-1952), Gerrards Cross, Nettlebed, Cheltenham and Berkeley Castle. Each area was hunted for three weeks at a time before moving on to the next kennels. Then as now, the master of the hunt was in control and paid the bills, but the huntsman he employed was the hero without whose skill the day would be nothing.

During his tenure as huntsman, Lord Fitzhardinge, later to become the 5th Earl of Berkeley, divided the hunt country with the Berkeley itself keeping the Gloucestershire end, and in 1801 a new hunt club at the eastern end becoming the Old Berkeley. This new hunt retained the yellow livery of the Berkeley with Fitzhardinge remaining as one of the masters but joined by two other masters.

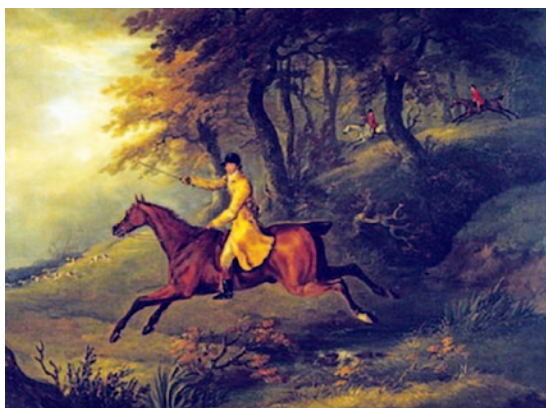
This arrangement was codified in 1806 with the setting up of a committee which included Fitzhardinge, now the 5th Earl of Berkeley and the Hon. Rev. William Capel (1775-1854) son of the Earl of Essex, a man of many parts. He was renowned as a sportsman, vicar of Watford, Rector of Raine in Essex, Chaplain in ordinary to Queen Victoria, a keen cricketer and member of the MCC.

Famously, he was sued for trespass in 1809 by his half-brother, the next Earl of Essex, when his hounds ran onto his property near Watford - Cassiobury Park - without consent and the followers broke one of the surrounding park rails. Essex won the action and was awarded damages of one penny. The case hinged around the question of whether a fox-hunter had the right to go anywhere he liked in pursuit of the fox. The answer was that they were not, even if the anywhere was their brother's garden.

Also on the committee was a Mr Williams. This was probably Owen Williams [d. 1832], MP for Marlow, racehorse owner and son of Col. Thomas Peers Williams of Temple House, Bisham. His wealth derived from his being the half owner of the mines on Parys Mountain on Anglesey. Williams also owned estates of 21,000 acres in Anglesey, Caernarvonshire, Buckinghamshire, Middlesex, Flintshire, Denbighshire, Roscommon and Berkshire.

Lastly on the committee was a Mr Du Pre, most likely James Du Pre of Wilton Park Beaconsfield (1778-1870), son of Josias - one time governor of Madras. Du Pre was MP for Gatton, then Aylesbury and finally Chichester.

This committee kept on the Berkeley huntsman Tom Oldaker, who filled the post with great renown until his death in 1831.



This painting by John Nost Sartorius shows Oldaker on his hunter, Magic, cheering on his hounds as they break cover in the Chiltern Hills. Oldaker was described as '... never a stauncher or gamier sportsman...' and 'keen, dashing when circumstances required it, but methodical and allowing hounds to work out serious problems by themselves...'





The painting by Abraham Cooper shows Young Harvey as master of the Old Berkeley in 1839, probably near his kennels at Parsonage Farm, Rickmansworth. His main residence, inherited from his father in 1818, being Cobham Park in Surrey, where he ran his stud.

In 1810 the 5th Earl of Berkeley died and the next Lord Fitzhardinge retreated to the vale country around Berkeley Castle, leaving the Old Berkeley to its own devices. The Old Berkeley took on the Berkeley's old Gerrards Cross kennels and in 1820 the last of the masters of the old committee, the not very Reverend William Capel retired.

This change in the generations saw the appointment of Mr Harvey Combe who took over the Old Berkeley country together with large areas of country to the west, including what later became the South Oxfordshire Hunt and, confusingly, the Old Berkshire Hunt. Combe was a wealthy brewer from Rickmansworth and to distinguish between the generations

was known as Young Harvey Combe, his father being Harvey Christian Combe, MP for the City of London and in 1799 Lord Mayor.

Combe gave up the pack in 1833, but returned to the hunt just the Old Berkeley country in 1834, when he purchased the famous Pytchley pack from Squire Osbaldeston. His huntsmen at various times were Richard Hills, Will Todd and reputedly Tom Oldaker's sons Henry and Robert being huntsman and whipper in respectively.

Harvey Combe retired in 1840 and the pack, where there had been some dispute over ownership, was sold at Tattershall's for a large sum – one of the lots, 5 couple of hounds, made 1,350gns.

Thomas Newland Allen of the Vache, Chalfont St Giles, took over from Harvey Combe for two seasons, retaining Will Todd as his huntsman. He was succeeded in 1842 by the 2nd Earl of Lonsdale who had been hunting his own harriers around Tring, kennelling them in the stables



at the Royal Hotel at Tring Station.

Lonsdale's career was in politics and divided his time between his London house in Carlton

Terrace, and his hunting box built as a wing to the Royal Hotel, using the new railway for his hunting commute.

He was the son of the 1st Lord Lonsdale, master of the Cottesmore Hunt, who was the model for R.S. Surtees character Lord Scamperdale with his Flat Hat Hunt, wickedly illustrated by John Leech.

It seems quite likely that this arrangement did not stand the test of time and the kennels appear to have been moved to the Grove at Tring.

Lonsdale's huntsman was the celebrated Jem Morgan previously with the Essex Hunt and its master Henry Conyers of Copt Hall.



This picture of Jem Morgan by an unknown artist shows the huntsman at the kennels at Tring, with Ivinghoe Beacon in the background with the Whipsnade Downs in the far distance.

One of the runs with Lord Lonsdale and Jem Morgan began at Drayton Beauchamp, close to the kennels at Tring, across the Broughton Brook and then leaving Aylesbury to the north, crossed 'a stinging brook at Ford ...with about sixteen feet of naked water which the [author's] mare skimmed over like a swallow...' to Tythroe Cover about two miles from Thame. Again, the fox won the day with Jem Morgan and the rest of the field miles behind, and a fourteen mile hack back to the kennels.

Jem Morgan retired soon after that with his place being taken by his son Godard Morgan. But he was still hunting when he met his end, from a broken neck jumping a five bar gate. He was 80 years old and had been hunting since he was a young boy.

**Part 2 will appear in our next Newsletter – May 2025.**

# 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 January

**Reading the Countryside.** A talk by John Tyler.

Monday 24th February

**Queen Mary, Consort of George V.** A talk by Jamie Carter.

Monday 31st March

**A Tour Guide's Story of the D-Day Landing  
Beaches of Normandy.** A talk by Michael Phillips.

Monday 28th April

**Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know -  
Lord Byron and his Women.** A talk by Jeremy Holmes.

Thursday 5th June

**King Zog of Albania.** A talk by Neil Rees.  
To be held in Lifestyle Centre, Amersham-on-the-Hill.

Monday 29th September

**The Gerrards Cross Cowboy.** A talk by Denise Beddows.

Monday 20th October

**AGM and talk.**  
We will be joined by a speaker from Helen & Douglas House.

Monday 24th November

**The Kennedys: Saints and Sinners.** A talk by Peter Hague.

Please note:

There will be no Programme leaflet this year. The full calendar of talks has been printed here and is also available on our website. As usual you will be reminded of all the talks and their dates in our regular E-alerts.

With effect from February the talks will take place on a Monday evening.

After the successful trial last year we will be holding our June talk in Amersham-on-the-Hill in the Lifestyle Centre.

**Website** <https://amershamsociety.org>  
**General Enquiries:** please email [info@amershamsociety.org](mailto:info@amershamsociety.org)