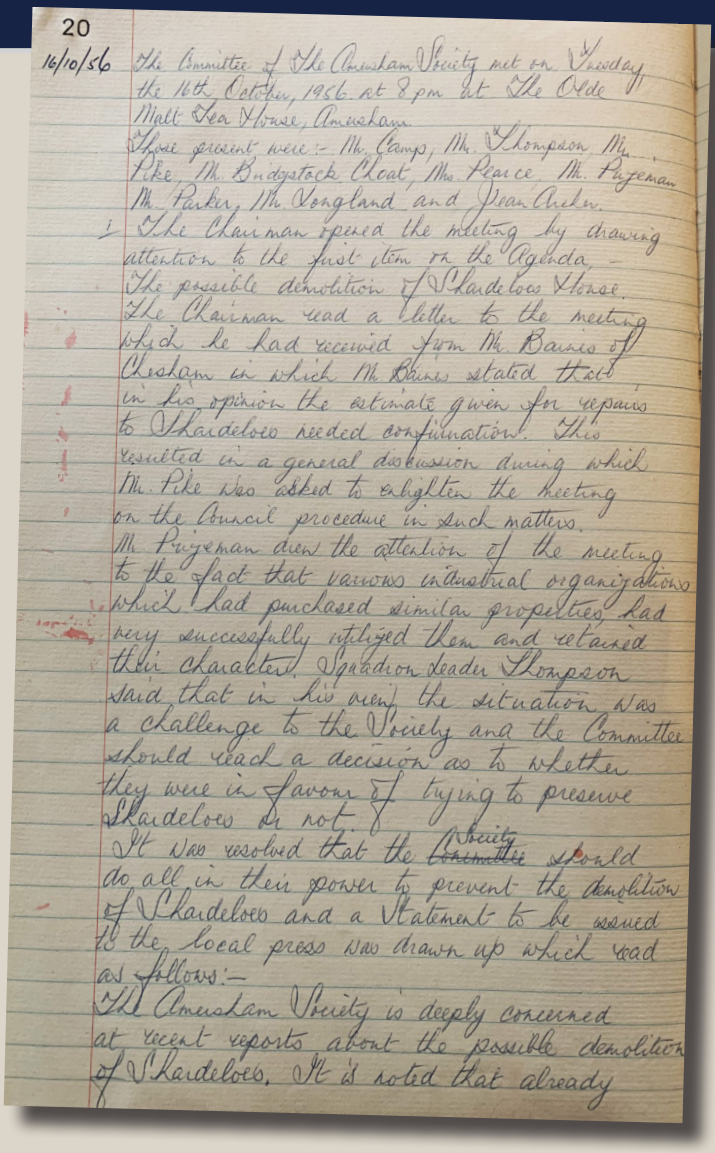
70TH ANNIVERSARY

AMERSHAM SOCIETY



20

16/10/56 The Committee of The Amersham Society met on Tuesday the 16th October, 1956 at 8 pm at The Olde Malt Tea House, Amersham

Those present were:- Mr. Camps, Mr. Thompson Mr. Pike, Mr. Bridgstock Cleat, Mrs. Pearce Mr. Pugeman Mr. Parker, Mr. Longland and Jean Aiken.

The Chairman opened the meeting by drawing attention to the first item on the Agenda - The possible demolition of Shardeloes House. The Chairman read a letter to the meeting which he had received from Mr. Banks of Chesham in which Mr Banks stated that in his opinion the estimate given for repairs to Shardeloes needed confirmation. This resulted in a general discussion during which Mr. Pike was asked to enlighten the meeting on the Council procedure in such matters.

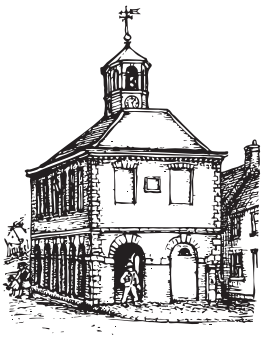
Mr Pugeman drew the attention of the meeting to the fact that various industrial organizations which had purchased similar properties had very successfully utilized them and retained their character. Squadron Leader Thompson said that in his view the situation was a challenge to the Society and the Committee should reach a decision as to whether they were in favour of trying to preserve Shardeloes or not.

It was resolved that the ~~Committee~~ Society should do all in their power to prevent the demolition of Shardeloes and a Statement to be issued to the local press was drawn up which read as follows:-

The Amersham Society is deeply concerned at recent reports about the possible demolition of Shardeloes. It is noted that already

SEPTEMBER 2026





In this Issue

4 **Editorial**
John Catton

6 **Chairman's report**
Edward Copisarow

8 **That was the decade that was... Part 2**
John Catton takes another look back to the 1950s when the Society was founded. How much do you remember?

10 **The River Misbourne is a chalk stream, so why is it called a river?**
Local geologist, Diana Smith, suggests it's neither a stream nor a river.

12 **Annual General Meeting: Monday 26th October 2026**
Geraldine Marshall-Andrew

13 **The Exile of Louis XVIII**
John Catton reports on last May's talk by local historian Neil Reece.

16 **How Green is Amersham Museum?**
Museum Director Briony Hudson writes about what it's really like running a museum.

21 **Amersham Museum's Hayward Bible**
The restoration of a bible once owned by the local Hayward family. In this article Peter Borrows endeavours to trace its origins.

24 **The Amersham Railway – Part 2**
The second instalment of Wendy Tibbitts three part story.

28 **The Society's Annual Outing**
Barbara Turner tells of an exciting day out in more ways than she had imagined!

29 **A brief history of the Postal Services in Amersham...**
...by Keith Wright, Secretary of the Amersham & District Philatelic Society.

32 **That was the decade that was... Answers**
John Catton - a few more interesting facts.

34 **Who was Benjamin Robertshaw?**
Marian Miller sets the scene prior to the big reveal on 6th November in St. Mary's church.

37 **Planning**
An update on several large local planning applications.

Noticeboard
Our programme of talks and events planned for the rest of 2026 and the first half of 2027

Amersham Society Officers

Chair
Edward Copisarow
07932 152522

Vice Chair and Newsletter Editor
John Catton
01494 726616

Hon. Secretary and Planning
Geraldine Marshall-Andrew
01494 433735

Design
Seema Davis
07903 822 532

Cover photograph:
Image of minutes of first committee meeting

Photograph opposite:
Image of Old Amersham looking towards the Old Rectory

Editorial

Welcome to our Autumn newsletter. Bearing in mind the weather we've been "enjoying", I can't really start without doing that very English thing of commenting on it. This newsletter is being brought together in early August, and you don't need me to tell you we're having a hot summer. The Met Office has recorded the hottest (temperatures reaching over 35°C) and driest July (no rain at all!) on record for our part of England, and we are about to enter our 5th heatwave! Were I writing this in 1956, I would have reported a maximum temperature in July of 20.9°C and rainfall 130.5mm, and the August Bank Holiday in London the coldest since 1880.

This dramatic shift in our weather patterns is not the only change we've experienced since our founding. You'll find another quiz on page 8 highlighting just some of the ways Amersham has changed in the past 70 years.

And, as always, you'll find a truly disparate range of articles with local themes covering a bible restoration project (page 21), the local philatelic society (page 29), the River Misbourne (page 10) and an inside view of how our museum is run (page 16).

As it's a special year in the history of the Society, on Monday 16th November we are mounting an additional evening meeting in St Mary's Church. It will be a reading of Benjamin Robertshaw's memoir by the actor, Don Crerar and, in a supporting role, Earl Howe playing the part of Daniel Baker, branded by Benjamin as "a silly but zealous Justice of the Peace". The production is being directed by well known local actor Stan Pretty, whom many of you will remember as the director of the Martyrs Plays for the Amersham Museum. But just who was Benjamin Robertshaw? See page 34.

Before going any further, I have to report that we are bidding a sad but fond farewell to two of the Society's officers.

Taking them in order of service length, the first is Yvonne Suckling. She joined the small Events Team in 2011 (yes, that's 15 years ago!), working quietly behind the scenes helping to organise the annual outings and taking the lead in arranging the eclectic but always interesting autumn/winter programme of talks we hold in the Kings Chapel - one of the visible manifestations of the Society along with our website and newsletter. I was delighted that she latterly came out of the shadows to present at the evening talks she had so ably organised.

The other is our Chair, Edward Copisarow, who will be retiring from this role at our AGM in October. He joined the committee in September 2014 and took over the chair from Dorothy Symes in 2023. He is a man of enormous energy with a prodigious memory along with a decisive and persuasive manner, qualities he fully used during his 3 years as chairman. His passion for local history has been evident in the number of articles he commissioned for the newsletter (he "guest edited" a bumper 54 page issue in January 2022) and will be on

display in November with readings from Benjamin Robertshaw's memoirs, an "Event" he initiated for our 70th Anniversary.

A huge thank you is due to them both for their contributions to the Society over their years of service.

This vibrant Society of some 340 members can only thrive by having a full complement of enthusiastic officers and committee members, ideally, in our case, twelve. With Edward and Yvonne leaving we are down to five, which means the remaining members are in effect doubling up on roles. We take pride in following up on local issues and ensuring the voices of residents are heard. If you want to preserve the unique character of your town and have an interest in local history would you like to / could you join us? Each member has a specific brief, it's really interesting and not an onerous commitment with the committee meeting every two months in the evening.

Our AGM is taking place on the 26th October (see agenda on page 12). This will be followed by a talk by a representative from the charity "Wycombe Homeless Connection". Please do join us.

One positive to come out of the glorious weather is that the activities in Amersham haven't been "rained off". There have been regular open-air markets and another wonderful season of concerts in the Memorial Gardens. The gardens, along with the planters around the town, are looking amazing thanks to the tireless efforts of the "Bloomers".

September 6th is Amersham Heritage Day, an event first held in 1997 in



Church Mead. It grew in popularity and by 2010 had expanded to include a small part of the High Street. Three years later, the Council increased the number of stall holders and street performers. It now takes over the whole High Street with the Council (I'm writing this before the event) expecting an attendance this year of over 8,000 people.

Whilst we may not have had any rain, there has been some flooding around the Market Hall - a fact which caught the attention of the national press! One, The Sunday Times (16th August), carried the headline "How fixing a leak in a market town took nearly two months". It referred to the 56 days it took Affinity Water to repair the leak, which was reported to them on 12th June but not finally fixed until 7th August.

Finally, a footnote to something I wrote in May 2025's Editorial about Ruth Ellis being buried in Amersham. Just two months ago, on 8th July, she was granted a conditional pardon by His Majesty the King following the Deputy Prime Minister's advice – an act of mercy recognising the historic injustice of the death penalty in this exceptional case. You'll be able to learn more about Ruth Ellis at next May's meeting, when Jeff Rozelaar will be talking about "The Last Lady".

John Catton



The Chairman's **Annual Report**

Our 70th year has seen the Society continue in fine form. It is also the 35th year since the Museum we founded 70 years ago became an independent charity, and we were pleased to contribute to the Museum's continuing work with an £800 grant towards the conservation of an early 17th century bible found in a local house and presented to the Museum in 2016. It was printed in London in 1610, just a year before the King James version and now has a stable binding and an archival box to make it fit for display and well protected when not out on view.

Having successfully managed the transition last year from Wednesdays to Mondays for our talks at the Kings Chapel, we this year had to face the challenge of increasing the admission price to cover the cost of teas and coffees. I'm delighted to report that all eight talks have remained extremely well attended. All seven talks at the Kings Chapel and our third annual summer talk at the Drake Hall were kindly written up for our newsletter by volunteers from the audience. Many thanks indeed to Yvonne Suckling and her events committee of two, Barbara Turner and Geraldine Marshall-Andrew, not only for putting together such a stimulating programme and ensuring that everyone is made welcome on the night, but also organising our annual outing, this year by coach to Knole Park in Kent. Our special 70th anniversary event will take place at St Mary's Church on 16th November. Thanks to remarkable research by Marian Miller, the autobiographical sketch of the Rev. Benjamin Robertshaw, the Rector of Amersham from the 1720s, who cleared slums and built the still impressive Rectory at the top of Rectory Hill, will be brought to life from a new transcription of a manuscript by Marian, directed by Stan Pretty and featuring Lord Howe as Robertshaw's nemesis, Daniel Baker. Do please put the date in your diary.

It was a year of change for our newsletter, as Seema Davis took over as our designer working with Editor John Catton to build on the extremely high standard of Amersham's favourite read. As well as 70th anniversary features such as our Amersham Now and Then quiz, the now familiar mix of historical and contemporary articles of local interest ranged from the 18th century canal which never ran through Old Amersham valley to the latest news on the completion of the HS2 headhouse. Many thanks of course are due to those who contributed articles and photographs to make this wonderful little magazine so outstanding.

The big planning issues that your Committee looked into and dealt with during the year by engaging with developers, Bucks Council and statutory consultees such as Amersham Town Council and The Gardens

Trust ranged from a huge housing development proposal at Quill Hall to the proposed battery storage site near Mop End Lane and HS2 proposal to build security compounds across the Grade II* registered parkland by Shardeloes Lake. We succeeded in persuading HS2 to change their plans, Bucks Council turned down the battery site proposal, and we are poised to comment on the Quill Hall proposal when the planning application is fully submitted. At time of writing, we are working through 450 page (plus appendices!) local plan for Buckinghamshire to make sure that Amersham's green spaces are protected from risk of inappropriate development over the next 10 years, and under Geraldine Marshall-Andrew's careful stewardship of our planning response, we'll be making representations to Bucks Council on any threats to our local environment.

Everyone on the Committee has roles to perform, and the backbone of our administration is a four-strong team of Peter Borrows on membership, John Morgan our Hon. Treasurer, Geraldine Marshall-Andrew as Secretary and Lena Morgan running our website, e-alerts and publicity. Peter gently reminds us all when it's time to renew, and has persuaded well over half of the membership to now renew automatically through direct debit. As a result, we saw a slight increase in our membership from the 340 I reported a year ago to 347. Following our significant expenditure in the last couple of years on the installation of our River Misbourne display boards on Church Glebe and Barn Meadow, John Morgan was able to shepherd our finances so that the strong membership figures and excellent attendance at events enabled us to make a small surplus for the first time in a few years. There are many people who contribute to make this possible and I'd like to make a special mention of the volunteers who hand deliver the newsletter to all of the local addresses in Amersham, saving us an otherwise huge postage cost.

And Lena's work is so seamless that all we see of it is a website that is always up to date and from which we get our e-alerts telling us what's happening, where and when, and the now regular notices of our talks on the Amersham Council Notice Boards and in the YOUR Amersham magazine. As ever, I need to thank a retiree for valiant service: Yvonne Suckling succeeded Dorothy Symes as our events committee chair, put together the whole of the programme for 2026 and has now finalised the programme for 2027. She'll be bowing out at the AGM. If you can't be there in person to congratulate her, do please email any messages we have to Geraldine when the AGM notice comes around.

I, too, will be stepping down from the Committee after 12 years, including four years as Vice Chair and the last three as Chair. I'm pleased to report that I'm passing the baton to John Catton with the Society in excellent shape, needing only a surge in enthusiastic additional volunteers, poised to take on anything from a single task to a role on the Committee.

Many thanks to everyone for their support during my time on the Committee and I look forward to continuing to enjoy the activities and fellowship of the Society in the years ahead.

Edward Copisarow







That was the decade that was...

...another look at post-war Amersham.

In January's newsletter we looked at some of the changes that were happening in Amersham during the decade when the Society was founded by way of a light-hearted quiz. Here, to elicit more facts, is a further quiz consisting of another 8 questions, with answers on page 32 & 33. But first, a few more events that took place in the country as a whole in those post-war years.

In 1951, two members of the "Cambridge Five" spy ring, Donald Maclean and Guy Burgess, escaped to Moscow and the first National Park, the Peak District, was established. Identity cards were abolished in February 1952.

Roger Bannister was the first person to run a sub four minute mile in 1954 (it's remarkable that, just last July, Josh Kerr surpassed this achievement by an astonishing 15 seconds), and the following year saw the launch of ITV and Mary Quant opened "Bazaar" in Chelsea. This was at a time when the national average wage was £9 pw (a pound in 1955 was equivalent to £33 today).

Then in 1956, the year the Society was founded, the Clean Air Act was passed in response to the "Great Smog" of December 1952, where sadly some 4,000 people died.

A significant overseas event happened in 1957 – the Treaty of Rome was signed by 6 European countries creating the European Economic Community, later to become the EU, whilst here in the UK the Lovell Telescope at Joderell Bank was completed. In 1958, Britain's first parking meters were introduced (in Mayfair) and the first Paddington Bear book was published. And finally, at the end of the decade, the first alphanumeric Postcodes were introduced (in Norwich) and Britain's first New Town, Stevenage, was officially opened by the Queen.

01

What was the population of (the local government area that included) Old Amersham and Amersham-on-the-Hill in 1951 and 1961?

02

Which company had a factory in Old Amersham and, in 1952, expanded its production facilities to Raans Road?

03

Ernö Goldfinger the renowned modernist architect who designed (among other buildings) the Brutalist Trellick Tower (in North Kensington and clearly visible from the train heading into London) and 2 Willow Road in Hampstead (now owned by the National Trust). As an aside, his modernest style was so hated by Ian Fleming that it inspired the name of his villain! But Ernö Goldfinger also designed a building in Amersham in 1956. What is the name of this building and where is it?

04

Which well known children's author, usually associated with Great Missenden, lived in Old Amersham from 1948 to 1951, and in which house?

05

An ex-WWII Army camp, "Beech Barn Camp," is now which cul-de-sac in Chesham Bois?

06

A. Currently No 1, The Broadway is the cafe "Koko'S". Prior to that, it was the clothing shop Joules. If you'd gone to the same address in the 1950s, what establishment would you have encountered?

B. What is its significance to the Amersham Society?

07

A school was built in 1956 where a small housing development, called Brudenell Close, now stands. What was the name of this school?

08

In 1957, before Shardeloes was listed, there were plans to demolish it, salvage the old bricks and use them to build new homes on the site. How many bricks were used to build Shardeloes in 1758?



The "River" Misbourne

The Misbourne as it flows through church glebe

I, your editor, come from the north of England, and a water course the size of the Misbourne would be called a brook or beck or stream, certainly not a river. Earlier this year a BBC "Countryfile" episode was devoted to the Chilterns and it, as would be expected, featured our universally rare chalk streams, one being the Hambledon brook. So, why is the Misbourne called a river?

Here local geologist Diana Smith answers my question and explains the geology behind chalk streams and the Misbourne in particular.

It all started with this question! Why is the Misbourne a 'river'? I think that is a convenient description of a waterway, to me it is simply the Misbourne – a 'bourne' or more correctly, a 'winterbourne'. This poses another question, why a 'bourne'? In the north, such a small waterway would be a 'beck'. That boils down to language: all these words stem from early sources. 'Beck' is from the old Norse 'bekkr', the area of 'becks' being that of Viking domination, whereas 'bourne' is from the word 'burna', a word of Germanic origin via the Old English 'winterburne', our area being the land of the Anglo-Saxons!

A 'winterbourne' is a stream which is intermittent, fed from an aquifer (note 1), which governs a water-table (note 2). Most aquifers are in limestone, more specifically in

our area chalk, a very pure form of limestone. During times of heavy and/or continuous rainfall, usually winter or spring, the rock aquifer saturates and the water-table which marks the top level of the water rises. When a stream bed or spring line, where there is an impermeable layer, encounters the water-table, the water leaks out and lets the 'bourne' or stream flow. It will continue to flow until the water-table drops, when the 'bourne' will dry up. We can see this process in action at, what is often regarded as the source of the Misbourne, which is conveniently situated opposite the Black Horse pub, down Mobwell on the Aylesbury Road as it leaves Great Missenden village. When the water-table is high enough, you can hear the spring in action as it fills the sunken area opposite the pub, otherwise the water just seeps out silently. You can follow the 'bourne' as it meanders through the fields towards Bougs Meadow in the village and on to the fields beyond Missenden Abbey. Another collection point or pond forms opposite the Chiltern hospital when the 'bourne' is flowing well.

One of the problems for all our chalk streams of the south-east face of the Chilterns, of which the Misbourne is one, is that the aquifers contain beautiful, clean water, which our water companies delight in extracting, thus reducing the level of water in the aquifers. This means the water-table drops, so our 'bourne' sources are starved of water and the 'bourne' will only flow where the stream bed encounters the lowered water-table – the lie of the land matters! Like all streams, 'bournes' flow downhill, so you may encounter the Misbourne flowing in Amersham by St Mary's church or behind Tesco, or in the Chalfonts, but its true source is 'dry' because the aquifer has been depleted!

Note 1
Aquifer – an underground water catchment, where water is stored in pore spaces between sediment particles and in small scale fractures. In our area, the aquifer is in the underlying chalk which is microfractured and that allows the water to build up. When the spaces are full, no more water can be stored, the zone is saturated.

Experiment – try putting some clean sand in a bucket, then see how much water you can pour gently into the bucket! How much does it take to saturate your aquifer?

Note 2
Water-table – this is the boundary between the part of the aquifer which is saturated and the part where the pore spaces and microfractures are full of air (referred to as the aerated zone). It can be thought of as the surface of the subsurface water. It is not flat – the term 'table' is misleading – it is governed by the lie of the land, curving up under hills and lowered beneath valleys.

Diana Smith

Annual General Meeting

The Society's Annual General Meeting will be held in the Kings Chapel on Monday 26th October 2026 at 8.00pm.

(To be preceded by a glass of wine or soft drink at 7.30).

Agenda

1 Apologies for absence

2 Minutes of the 2025 Annual General Meeting and business arising

3 Chairman's Annual Report

4 Honorary Treasurer's Report and Statement of Accounts.

5 Election of Committee Members and Officers**

6 Any other business

The Annual General Meeting will be followed by:

- Discussion of topics raised by members
- TALK: We will be joined by a speaker from Wycombe Homeless Connection

** Election of Committee Members and Officers.

Nominations should be sent by 19th October to the Hon. Secretary at 162 High Street, Amersham, HP7 0EG or info@amershamsociety.org.

The Exile of King Louis XVIII… in Buckinghamshire



Hartwell House by Antoine Ignace Melling

In March, the entertaining and deeply informative speaker Neil Rees was invited to the Society for the third time–and he started the talk by asking us if we liked Bourbon biscuits! He went on to explain "I don't know if you know, but the name of the Royal House of France is the House of Bourbon. Every time you eat one of those biscuits, let it remind you of this talk". The old English coat of arms even features the Bourbon *fleur-de-lis* because English kings once also claimed to be kings of France.

To understand how Louis XVIII ended up in Buckinghamshire, we have to go back to the French Revolution. The royal family had become autocratic and out of touch, leading to the revolution where King Louis XVI was guillotined in 1793. France became a Republic and his son and heir, Louis XVII, was imprisoned, dying in captivity in 1795. For Royalists, though, succession passed to his brother Louis, the Count of Lille (later Louis XVIII).

Having overthrown one autocratic leader, the French ended up with another: Napoleon Bonaparte, who crowned himself Emperor and began a series of military campaigns across Europe and the Middle East. Meanwhile, the remaining Bourbons were forced into exile. Louis escaped first to Germany, then to Mitau in Russia (modern-day Latvia) as a guest of Tsar Paul I. Eventually, as often happened with European exiles, he ended up in Britain.

The Duke of Buckingham offered sanctuary to Louis, and in 1807 he arrived, via Great Yarmouth, at one of the Duke's houses, Gosfield Hall, in Essex. Louis lived there until 1811, but he frequently visited the Duke's main house at Stowe. We have a wonderful eyewitness account of his visit in 1808 from the noted diarist Betsey Wynne. In it she recorded a massive dinner, actually drawing out the table plan. She tells us there were 22 courses–a staggering amount of food–and lists the guests, including Captain Fremantle and Lord Grenville,



King Louis XVIII

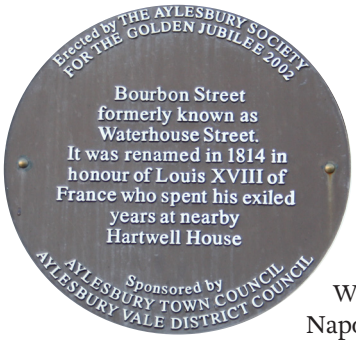
sitting alongside Louis's nephew, the Duke of Angoulême. To commemorate the visit, each member of the royal family planted an oak tree around what is now called the Bourbon Tower, an event reported in the Oxford Journal in 1808. Sadly, today most of the trees are gone.

In 1809, Louis's entourage, all 109 of them, moved to Hartwell House near Aylesbury, which belonged to Sir William Lee, a friend of the Duke's. The French court was a world unto itself. Louis had his household, the Queen had hers, and his nephew, the Duke of Angoulême, had his. This group of 109 people included footmen, kitchen staff, courtiers, doctors, and clergy, all meticulously detailed in a list of tenants kept by the Duke of Buckingham. Being devout Roman Catholics, they had even brought their own Archbishop, who conducted Mass every week in the private chapel at Hartwell. Because they were short on money, the courtiers famously turned the lead roofs into a miniature farm, keeping chickens and rabbits in cages and growing vegetables in tubs. Today, Hartwell House is a National Trust property run as a hotel and spa with rooms named after the people who stayed in them—thus you can sleep in the Louis XVIII room.

Louis travelled all over the South of England—visiting the Isle of Wight, London, Liverpool, Oxford, and Cambridge—meeting important people and fashionable society. But the court also left a mark on the local community. Neil found records of five marriages in the parish registers between French courtiers and local girls from Hartwell, Stone, and Aylesbury. When the court eventually left, these wives went to France with them, meaning there are likely people in the Paris region today with Buckinghamshire ancestry!

Not everyone made it back, though. The burial registers for Hartwell Church show several French burials. Because they were Catholic, they couldn't use the Anglican ground; they had to have a specific corner consecrated by their own Catholic bishop. The only exception was the King's wife, Marie-Joséphine, who died at Hartwell and was buried in Westminster Abbey—later, her remains were moved back to Europe.

By 1813, the British government was looking for a peaceful constitutional monarch to replace Napoleon. On 1 February 1813, a delegation met in the library at Hartwell House and offered Louis the throne. Louis agreed and made a declaration that he would rule "nicely" and respect democracy. The desk where he signed his provisional



acceptance is still to be seen at Hartwell.

When Napoleon was finally defeated in the following year, Louis left Hartwell for good–on the 20 April 1814. An artist was later commissioned to paint the scene of the departure–it's the closest thing we have to a photograph. As he travelled through Aylesbury, the town was alive with celebrations. The people gave him the address, saying they "beg leave most respectfully" to offer their sincere and heartfelt congratulations on the restoration of the throne. Louis's reply was quite touching. He thanked them for their "kind and friendly address" and said that of all his "long wanderings", his stay in Aylesbury would be his "most soothing" memory. In honour of his stay Waterhouse Street was renamed Bourbon Street.

From Aylesbury, he went to Berkhamsted and stayed at the King's Arms, where he became very friendly with the landlord's daughter, "Pretty Polly" Page. He then travelled to Dover via London (he was great friends with the Prince Regent) and was again met by ecstatic crowds. Louis sailed from Dover on the Royal Sovereign on 24 April 1814 arriving back in Paris amidst enormous celebrations. In a wonderful touch of sentimentality, he brought the desk from the library at Hartwell House all the way to France so he could sign the new French Constitution on the same desk where he had accepted the throne.

Years later, after he became king, he invited "Pretty Polly" Page to visit him in Paris. This caused quite a scandal in the newspapers. When journalists interviewed her, wondering if she was his lover, she gave a brilliant answer: *"The only King's Arms I've ever slept in is the inn in Berkhamsted!"*

Back at Hartwell, Sir William Lee returned to find his cellar full of wine that the French hadn't finished. These were subsequently auctioned in June 1814, records in the *Northampton Mercury* indicated there were 5,033 bottles left behind!

After Louis death (of obesity, gout and gangrene) in 1824, he was succeeded by his younger brother, the Count of Artois, Charles X. Unlike Louis, who was "nice and mellow," Charles wanted to be an absolute monarch. The French had enough and overthrew him in the 1830 Revolution (the revolution depicted in *Les Misérables*).

His son, Louis XIX, then became king for exactly 20 minutes before being forced to abdicate–a Guinness World Record for the shortest reign. Eventually, the French elected Napoleon's nephew as president, who then crowned himself Emperor Napoleon III. He, too, ended up in exile in England. The cycle of French history is quite something!

But the story for us is that for five years, a King of France lived right here in Hartwell, leaving us with a street name, a few graves, and a very large empty wine cellar.

John Catton



How Green is Amersham Museum?

Amersham Before Plastic mobile museum exhibition, 2022

Our museum director, Briony Hudson, kindly contributes an article to each of our newsletters. Usually it's about an upcoming exhibition, but this time Briony opens up as to what its like to run a museum. And as you will read, its not just about looking after a collection of aged local artifacts!

By definition, museums look to the past, but Amersham Museum is also committed to looking forward, including in environmental sustainability terms. It is vital as a business to continue to improve our own green performance, not least because of the impact on utility bills, which is a key financial consideration for every small organisation. We face potential challenges in making significant changes with our limited capacity and budget, and our location in a listed building, but we have been focussed for a number of years on taking small steps for overall improvements. None of this is rocket science, but it may be interesting to hear how we are approaching the many interlinked challenges.

As an organisation that engages with the public and has numerous channels of communication to help to build confidence in the community to take action, a museum is also well placed to prompt discussion about climate change and our impact on the planet.

Amersham Before Plastic

Much of the museum's work has been done in partnership, beginning in 2021/22 with our 'Amersham Before Plastic' project, with Sustainable Amersham. With funding from the Lottery Heritage Fund and Amersham Community Board, the project

comprised of a range of activities around the theme of shopping and consumption. Through an exhibition in the museum developed with our Young Curators group, outreach events and an exhibition with Anthony, our mobile museum, and schools sessions for over 300 Key Stage 2 pupils, the project explored shopping in the past, and used this as a way to start discussions with local people about single-use plastics, reusable cups and much more. The project led to oral histories and objects being added to the museum's collections, including a photographic record of 620 photos of local shops today, views on sustainability collected from over 70 people shared with Sustainable Amersham, and 'pledge cards' to prompt people to commit to taking their own steps. One strategic outcome from the project was the establishment of a sustainability policy for the museum, and a trustee taking on oversight for this area.

Everyday actions

In 2023, we surveyed all of the museum's volunteers to ask what we could do at Amersham Museum to be more environmentally friendly. We also formed a small working group to push these developments forward, and take action. Many of our steps have been small and gradual: putting tea bags into the garden compost bins (a museum with over 100 volunteers generates lots of used tea bags!); improving our recycling systems; using tea-towels and a traditional milkman. Our garden team continue to make our own compost from clippings; use a water butt for watering cans, and use techniques such as spraying dilute washing up liquid to deal with black fly infestations on individual plants if needed. We also buy catering and cleaning supplies in large quantities, decanting into smaller containers as appropriate.

Making choices

In terms of operation and procurement, we've been prompted to reflect on our choices. For example, we altered the advice for our Duty Managers to consider whether all of the lights need to be put on at the start of their shift. In our shop, we have stopped stocking products made from plastic (apart from the replica slugs which are such a good fundraiser!), and started to phase out greetings cards wrapped in plastic, in favour of those with 'belly bands' or compostable wrap, if any at all. We moved to stocking branded paper carrier bags, which we offer for large purchases only.

We also prioritise working with local businesses and craftspeople wherever possible.

For schools and family activities, we continued to base many sessions around upcycling and re-use, for example making Victorian cup and ball games from a toilet roll and foil.

We aim to keep informed in other areas where we can make choices. For example, we are moving the final element of our digital work, our

collections database files, to a cloud server this year, meaning that all of our files will then be stored virtually. We continue to try to keep abreast of the environmental impact of AI, while bearing in mind its strengths. We have reviewed the environmental policies of the museum's bank, pensions provider and investment management firm, and will continue to explore this area.

Core collections work

As an Accredited museum, we have responsibilities to store, handle, display and conserve objects following best practice. However, environmentally sustainable collections work is a key area for discussion and research in our sector, and we continue to learn from others. We have implemented various measures in recent years, including a grant-funded TerraCycle box for our used nitrile gloves, which we wear when working with potentially hazardous historical items, so that after collections sessions they are not put in the general bin, but will be sent away to be recycled once the box is full. We have also moved entirely to printing exhibition panels on cardboard rather than anything with a plastic element like Foamex, and we print our own exhibition captions and signage on paper which can be displayed in re-usable stands. We are also exploring the possibility of recycled and re-usable storage for our larger framed paintings, which in the past were typically stored in plastic-based materials.

The bigger picture

In 2023, we commissioned a carbon audit related to our energy usage from Sam Free of Sustainable Amersham, which included analysis of our utility bills and use of an infra-red camera to look for draughts. As well as significantly increasing our understanding of the issues in our building and potential measures we could take, this report also underpinned three successful grant applications that have enabled us to take greater steps.

We were able to engage Rory Cullen, heritage buildings specialist, to produce a thermal efficiency report, funded by the John Brazil Charitable Trust, to assess our current performance and suggest appropriate improvements given the age and status of our buildings.

As a result of the audit and the report, we were successful in 2025 with an application to the new Rothschild Foundation Green Grant scheme to pay for secondary glazing in our non-listed building (51 High Street) and new thermally efficient blinds. We have also commissioned lined removable curtains for the two large windows in our upstairs Tudor Room that we can use during our closed winter period to exclude draughts, and to seek a specialist to carry out an 'MOT' of the windows to improve their condition where possible.

With a Green Grant from Museums Development South East (MDSE), we carried out 12 months of activity.

This funding underpinned a range of measures from installing a hand-drier in each toilet to reduce paper waste, and ensuring better draught exclusion for the external doors and pipe lagging where appropriate, to working with Bucks Culture in 2024/25 to co-host 'Green Gatherings' to hear from experts in different fields from historic buildings management to digital impact. This project was captured in a film as a case study for the wider museum sector which you can find on the MDSE YouTube channel at https://youtu.be/3TUCO5lBRUg?si=fyNce3UTiolo7m7g

Earlier in 2026, Museum trustees Martin Day and Jane Barnes and Director Briony Hudson completed a one-day carbon literacy training course, thanks to Amersham Town Council, which enabled us to learn more about the science underpinning our understanding of climate change, and pledge to make personal and organisational changes for the better. For the museum, this has meant communicating our actions to date with our volunteer body, and seeking their input for future steps, and working to embed environmentally sustainable action into our forward planning, across all of our activities, rather than viewing it as a separate element of our work.

Partnerships

As well as working within our own museum community, and peers in the heritage sector, we have been very lucky to build strong



Bring It Back group installation of wildflower circles in St Mary's Churchyard, 2025

partnerships, particularly with Sustainable Amersham and Wild Amersham. Having run collaborative workshops with Wild Amersham in recent years, we used a grant from the Chalk, Cherries and Chairs Next Generation project run by Chilterns National Landscape to establish a new partnership project.

Our Bring it Back group for 18-25 year olds is co-hosted with Wild Amersham with the aim to explore and implement measures to improve biodiversity and communicate history in the area surrounding St Mary's Church in Old Amersham. Following a range of workshops and surveys from experts in both nature and history, the group have carried out baseline surveys, successfully implemented three wildflower circles



Botanist Karen van Oostrum leading an Amersham Amble in July 2026

within the churchyard, worked with others to plant spring bulbs, cowslips and primroses (and keep the young plants watered!), planned for the installation of bird boxes later in the year, and successfully applied for church permission to plant a new native hedge. The group is also currently working on a grant application to fund two etched illustrated benches in the churchyard that will share information about both nature and history with local residents and visitors.

The Museum has also worked with Wild Amersham, and local botanist Karen van Oostrum (All About Plants) to run a series of events. These include seasonal Amersham Ambles led by Karen to allow close focus on the wild species visible throughout Old Amersham, and botanical workshops for both children and adults, focussing in 2026 on the rose family broadly, including apples and cherries and their part in local history, alongside increasing participants' botanical vocabulary and confidence. In supporting our visitors to learn more about the natural world around them, we hope this will bolster wider efforts to protect and promote it.

Briony Hudson



Amersham Museum's Hayward Bible

2026 is the 500th anniversary of William Tyndale's New Testament (1526). He was the first person to translate the New Testament into English directly from the original Greek, his clear style became the foundation for subsequent English translations, and his influences can be seen throughout the King James Bible (1611).

At a time when translating the Bible into the language of the ordinary people was forbidden, Tyndale was forced to live in exile. He was subsequently betrayed, imprisoned and, in 1536, executed.

This year the Amersham Museum is marking the anniversary with a range of activities. One is the commissioning of the conservation of an early English Bible in their collection. The work is being carried out by accredited book and archives conservator, Ann-Marie Miller ACR.

The Bible being restored was once owned by the local Hayward family and in this article Peter Borrows eendeavours to trace its origins.

At the Committee meeting in January 2026, we agreed the Society should contribute towards the cost of conservation of the Museum's Hayward Bible. With other donations, the Museum has now been able to commission the work which includes repairing and stabilising the binding, repairing and re-attaching loose pages, and creating a bespoke archival box for storage. We hope to be able to publish an account of this process in a future issue.

The Bible is certainly early 17th century and according to the Museum's Accession Record, it was printed in 1610, but this has recently been questioned. If this early, it would have to be based on Tyndale's translation rather than the King James version of 1611. A detailed examination of the text should resolve the matter. It was printed by Robert Barker in London, printer to James I & VI, who printed the King James Bible. (His father had been printer to Elizabeth I.) Barker also printed the infamous 'wicked' bible, which omits the word 'not' in the commandment 'Thou shalt not commit adultery'.

The Bible was given to the Museum some ten years ago by a donor whose

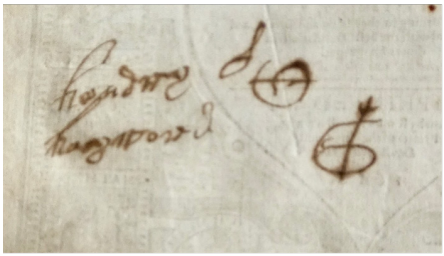


family had lived in Bury Cottage and then moved to Chestnuts. She was born and grew up at Chestnuts but was not sure whether the Bible came from there or Bury Cottage. There have been suggestions that it was discovered concealed in a wall but that is not mentioned in the Museum's Accession Record.

Chestnuts was on Amersham Common and the donor described it as a 15th century farmhouse which was demolished in 1969. Certainly, there was demolition in order to build what is now Chestnut Lane School on the site but the Bucks Heritage Portal's Building Record states that the school was built on the site of a former Victorian villa. A building on the site in the 1841, 1851 and 1881 censuses was called Chestnut Cottage and The Chestnuts in 1871. It was also called The Chestnuts on the 1876 OS map. It is possible that an earlier building was hiding behind a Victorian facade. On the 1838 Tithe Map (see Amersham Society Newsletter, January 2026, page 9) the L-shape of the building was almost identical to that on the 1876 OS map. On the tithe apportionment the farm and adjacent fields, in all amounting to some 13 acres, were owned and occupied by William Scott. He also farmed some fields in the neighbouring parish of Chesham Bois, confirmed by his entry in the 1851 Census where he is described as farming 46 acres.

Bury Cottage, now 6 London Road, is a listed building, part of Bury Farm, a separate building just to the east of the main farmhouse / manor house. The donor's family had lived there in the 1910s although she had been born in 1938 long after they had move to Chestnuts. It is said that in the early 16th century the cottage was used by the Lollards for their conventicles - secret meetings where they read the Bible and learned to pray in English. The entire complex was rented from the Lord of the Manor from about 1450 to 1625 by the Saunders family, some of whom were prominent Lollards, especially in the period 1500 – 1525. Around 1670 the farmhouse was rented to a prominent Quaker family, the Penningtons so it is at least plausible that the Bible might have come from there.

The King James Bible was larger than the Museum's Bible and was sold for



10 shillings (£0.50) (unbound) or 12 shillings (£0.60) (bound), at a time when a typical labourer's wage was 8 – 10 (old) pence per day (£0.03 – 0.04). The family that bought it must have been relatively wealthy to be able to afford a Bible.

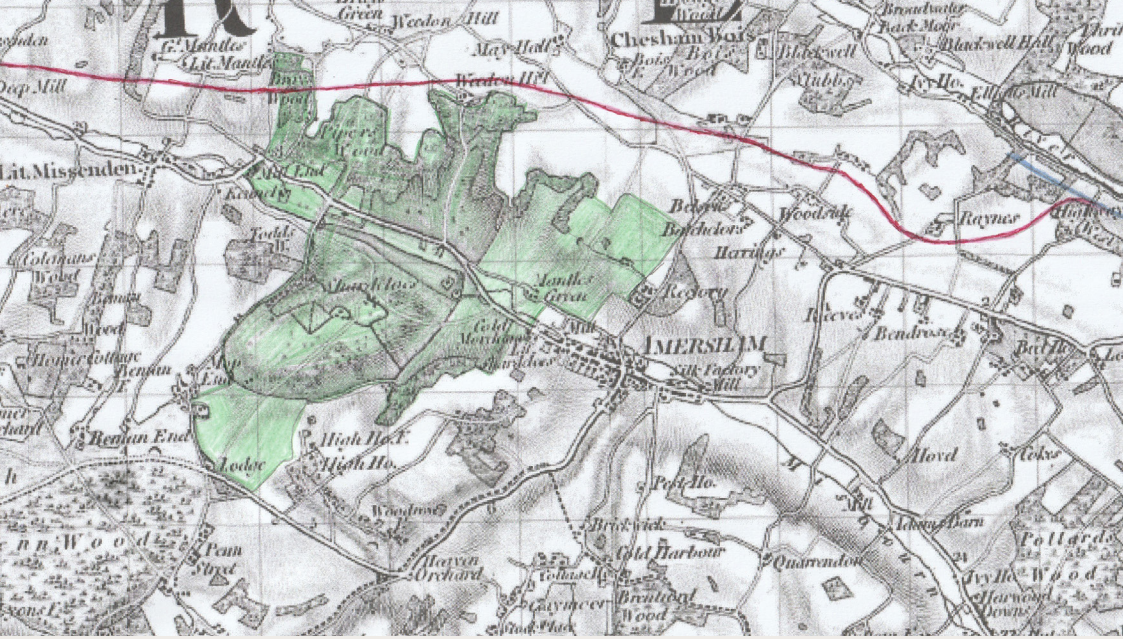
At some point in its history the Bible had been owned by the Hayward family. It is not a Family Bible, unlike that belonging to my late, Welsh brother-in-law, with all the family births, deaths & marriages listed on pages near the start. But there are names – and some other inscriptions – on various pages, almost as if children were practising to write with a quill pen on paper. Perhaps the Bible was the only piece of paper in the house. The names are Henry Hayward, Marg(ar)et Hayward (quite unusual for the time, a woman who was able to write), Edmund Hayward and Thomas Hayward. With detailed examination, it may be possible to decipher further names. The name Henry Hayward matches the HH on the cover but may well be a later addition.

Who were the Haywards, where and when did they live? I have started to research the family. One possibility is Henry Hayward who was buried at St Mary's Church, Amersham on 1st March 1694. There are other records of different Haywards being baptised, married or buried in Amersham but none I can tie to Henry. For example, Thomas Hayward married Mary Sills on 25 April 1633 and Elizabeth, daughter of Thomas was baptised 31 March 1646. Elizabeth Hayward, wife of Thomas, was buried 22 August 1669. Also, Sarah, daughter of John and Ann Hayward was baptised 18 March 1670.

If we accept that spelling of surnames was not always consistent at that time, then intriguingly several people with the surname Heywood can be found in local Quaker records of the period. John Heywood (of London) married Elizabeth Harrison (of Amersham) on 10 December 1676, with witnesses including Joseph, Richard and David Heywood. Two of John and Elizabeth's children, both called John, were buried in the Friends Meadow (in Whielden Street) in 1682 and 1686. Intriguing, given the possible link to the Quaker Pennington family of Bury Farm but none of these are obviously related to Henry Hayward and the others who wrote in the Museum's Bible.

Does anyone know of any more connections? Or does anyone have or know of a picture of the original Chestnuts farmhouse or its Victorian incarnation? If so, please e-mail me at peterborrows@cantab.net.

Peter Borrows



The Amersham Railway

PART 2

Wendy Tibbitts has devoted a huge amount of time researching the numerous attempts to construct a railway line through Old Amersham, which of course we all know never materialised. Part one was printed in our May newsletter, here is part two. Her findings will be concluded in next January's newsletter.

For Amersham, still predominately agricultural, the mid-nineteenth century saw changes creeping into the farming way of life. After the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, before which corn prices had been kept artificially high, farmers were forced to become more competitive in their prices. Some changed their type of crop, or farming speciality, but many farms struggled to remain viable and towards the end of the century this resulted in a national agricultural depression. For the Drake family, whose income relied on the rents from their struggling tenants, they must have been aware of changes in their lifestyle as vacated tenancies reduced their income. The Squire of Amersham, his wealth and influence waning, realised he had to move with the times.

Thomas Tyrwhitt Drake had rejected the idea of a railway line in Amersham in 1852, much to the dismay of local ratepayers, but the citizens were not going to give up so easily. At a crowded meeting held at the Griffin Inn on 12 January 1853, the meeting chairman, William Weller, proposed a resolution for the building of a railway line that now had the backing of the London and North-Western Railway, from Watford, through Rickmansworth to Chorleywood, Chenies, Little Chalfont and Amersham.[1] William Weller outlined the benefits a railway would bring to the area and several people spoke in support of the line. Mr Fuller of Chesham approved the proposal but suggested an amendment to construct a terminus on Chesham Bois Common which would then be convenient for both Amersham and Chesham. This caused a long discussion, but as the initial notice had already been given to Parliament, it was suggested that they should not miss this opportunity to get this railway through Parliament and then, in the future, a branch line to Chesham could be added. It was known that the main opposition came from one landowner who was opposed to the "introduction of such modern innovations as railways". The original proposition was carried by a majority. On the resolution of the Hon. C. Cavendish, M.P., who was a "strenuous" supporter, a committee was appointed to communicate with the neighbouring landowners on the proposals. A vote of thanks was given to the London and North-Western Company for their offer to construct the line.

Ten days later there was another public meeting at the Freemason's Hall in Watford. Over 300 people were there to discuss two new Railway Bills for the London and North-Western Railway. One line would go north from Watford to St Albans and one to go west from Watford to Amersham. The meeting agreed that the new railway would be good for all concerned, especially if the Amersham line eventually extended to Oxford. However, Mr Charsley, speaking on behalf of Mr Drake, told the meeting that Mr Drake would oppose the proposal. This was greeted by hissing, but he went on to explain that although the current plans would not cause too many problems for Mr Drake, any extension to the line would "materially injure" his property.[2] However, he told the meeting that Mr Drake had a suggestion to make. If the line to Amersham was carried along the top of the hill instead of in the valley of Amersham, there would be less engineering difficulties and it would still be useful to the neighbourhood. There were cries of "No, no" in the hall and they unanimously resolved to put forward the existing plans to Parliament. This appears to be the first time a different route, other than the Amersham valley, had been suggested.

Meanwhile, other railway companies saw the gap in the railway network around Amersham and sought to fill it. The Watford and Wendover Railway company proposed to build a railway from Watford Junction through Rickmansworth, Chenies and Little Chalfont to Amersham, Little



Figure 1 Bradshaws Railway Map of Great Britain 1870. Bodleian Library: ALMA : 990202428160107026

Missenden, Great Missenden, and Wendover in 1858. All the landowners assented, including T.T. Drake who was "not a particular lover of railways".[3] William Lowndes of Chesham was Chairman of the steering committee. Twelve hundred shares were sold, but this was not enough to make the company viable and it was wound up.[4] [image 1]

Three years later, the Rickmansworth, Amersham & Chesham Railway was proposed by Lord Ebury (Moor Park, Rickmansworth). He had already built a line from a now defunct station near the canal in Rickmansworth to Watford High Street, and had seen his proposed railway between Rickmansworth and Uxbridge thrown out by the Lords, but now he wanted to build a railway from Rickmansworth to Chenies, Chesham, Chesham Bois, Weedon Hill, through Brays Wood to Little Missenden and onwards to Wendover. The surveyors of the line came across opposition from the landowners and by 1865 the company had to seek an extension to their Bill. By now the proposal was competing with other proposals for the same route and eventually the company run out of funds.

There were two further serious attempts to get a line built between Rickmansworth and Aylesbury over the same route in 1864 (thrown out by the Commons) and 1865 (Bill Withdrawn). Railways in urban areas were becoming expensive to build and unless the landowners virtually gave their properties away, the project was not viable.

A London, Buckinghamshire and West Midlands Railway company made a proposal to build a railway through the Amersham valley in 1866, but despite sending delegations to the two main opponents; Mr Newdigate (Harefield) and Mr Drake (Amersham), they would not give their consent and the Bill was withdrawn.[5] [image 2]

In November 1867 a letter appeared in the Bucks Chronicle from a gentleman called Archibald White of Great Missenden detailing the efforts being made to extend the Rickmansworth Railway to Aylesbury. He and a deputation of large landowners of Aylesbury had approached the London and North-Western Railway Company (L.N.W.R). The Chairman of the L.N.W.R, Richard Moon, told the visitors that his company might consider extending the line from Rickmansworth to Bois Common, at a point mid-way between Amersham and Chesham, but he would hope the landowners would give the land to them or at least sell it at very

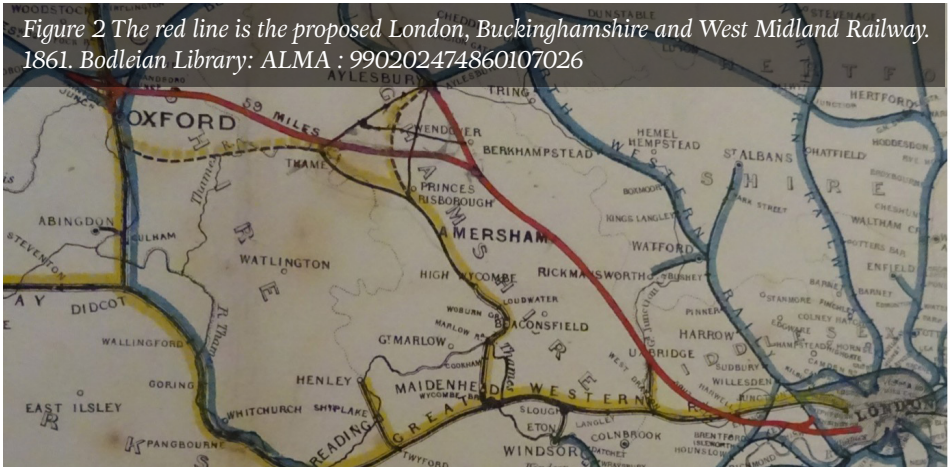


Figure 2 The red line is the proposed London, Buckinghamshire and West Midland Railway. 1861. Bodleian Library: ALMA : 990202474860107026

reasonable terms. The letter writer went away to talk to the landowners and reported that no landowner would give the land away, but would sell it for its agricultural value.[6] A subsequent meeting was arranged with the railway company and the landowners, but only Lord Ebury (of Moor Park) and Mr Thynne (agent for T.T. Drake) were present. The L.N.W.R Chairman, Richard Moon, who had been described by his contemporaries as a "cold, austere, [and] even [a] ruthless 'skinflint'"[7] then asserted that he had not offered to buy the land, and that his company would only consider building the line if the land was given to them. If the landowners were not prepared to give their land away, then his company was not interested. The railway Chairman's attitude was that even though they would give the land away, they could see the value of the surrounding land increase five- to eight-fold. However, the landowners, by now accustomed to approaches from many railway companies, were getting wise and started to inflate the value of their land. The land market had changed since the birth of the railways, and the landowners now saw the advantage of having a railway nearby, but few were prepared to sacrifice their land without getting a fair price.

After a bewildering number of schemes to bring the railway to Amersham in the 1860s, and numerous disappointments, there was a decade of inactivity until the final battle took place in 1881 when several proposals were submitted to Parliament at the same time, all of them backed by influential landowners, but only one could be successful. How did the Commons Select Committee decide which one?

Wendy Tibbitts

[1] London and North-Western Railway. Illustrated London News (London, England), Saturday, January 15, 1853; pg. 43; Issue 603 [2] Morning Post - Monday 24 January 1853 [3] Bucks Herald – Saturday 23 October 1858. [4] Buckinghamshire Archives. D-LO/10/3 [5] Uxbridge and W. Drayton Gazette – Saturday 7 April 1866. [6] Bucks Chronicle and Bucks Gazette - Saturday 16 November 1867 [7] Nock, O.S., The London and North Western Railway, (London, 1960), p.33.

The Society's annual outing to **KNOLE HOUSE**



Wednesday 24th June was the date of this year's annual outing to the famous Knole House in Sevenoaks, Kent.

It must have been one of the hottest days of the year. However, this did not deter the twelve stalwarts venturing out for the day. We were very lucky to have an enormous, air-conditioned 53-seater coach, which turned out to be a blessing in disguise as an accident on the M25 led to its complete closure, delaying our arrival by two hours.

Knole House is one of the most amazing and most significant and largest (one of the top five) country houses in England. There is a walled garden covering 26 acres set within 1,000 acres of mediaeval deer parks, with a collection of 35 Sika and many herds of fallow deer, known for their glorious and unique colouring.

Knole has 365 rooms, 53 staircases and 7 courtyards; it is massive, covering 4 acres. James Fiennes purchased the house and began an ambitious building project around 1444. However, he was executed for treason just a few years later and his family sold the house to Thomas Bourchier, the Archbishop of Canterbury, for £266 13s 4d. Knole later became a royal residence after Henry VIII admired the house while hunting with Archbishop Cranmer in 1538. His daughter, the future Mary I, lived here whilst Henry VIII finalised his divorce from her mother, before gifting it to the Sackville family who have resided there for over 400 years.

Once out of our wonderfully air-conditioned coach and straight into the heat of the day, it was difficult to know where to begin. Knole is a collector's treasure house, rich in old masters, classical sculptures, magnificent silverware and silver furniture - all rare seventeenth-century survivors. The most wonderful historic showrooms were a must-see, they hold an incredibly rare, well-known, collection of Royal Stuart furniture, textiles, tapestries and portraits. The literary connection is, of course, famous in its own right, with one former resident as an example, the writer and poet Vita Sackville-West.

The café was splendid with jugs and jugs of iced water and, because of the extreme heat the kitchens had closed, the food was cold, but it was plentiful and very tasty.

It was a brilliant, if rather short, visit to Knole House. But we did have one final piece of excitement: the return journey had to be via the Dartford Tunnel since the M25 clockwise was still closed. So, in one day we had completed the full 117-mile circuit of the M25!

Barbara Turner

Amersham Postal Services



Amersham's High Street Post Office which opened in 1891 © Amersham Museum

I was looking through past editions of the Society's newsletter and came across this in January 1996's newsletter:

FORTHCOMING EVENTS: ***February 28th - "The Queen's Stamps", a talk by Charles Goodwyn. What goes on with the Queen's vast stamp collection? - who better to answer that question than the Keeper of the Queen's stamps, local resident and Amersham Society member, Charles Goodwyn *.***

I'm delighted to report that the Amersham & District Philatelic Society is still thriving and here Keith Wright, its Secretary, tells us a bit about the history of the postal service in Amersham.

In 1635, King Charles I proclaimed that a post be set up to carry the letters of his subjects. Prior to this, there was a service for the King only based on 6 main routes serving important ports, all radiating from London: Dover, Yarmouth, Holyhead, Edinburgh, Plymouth and Bristol.

In 1660 services were re-organised and opened up more fully to the public. All letters were required to go into London and back out on the most appropriate road. A combination of Horse Riders and Commercial Carriers under contract carried out this work. Charges were based on the total mileage into and out of London and the number of sheets of paper sent. Receiving Houses were established in Post Towns, usually within Grocers, Stationers or a Public House. Here in Amersham the Crown Inn was chosen. The exact date is unclear, however, it is recorded that in 1774 the Postmaster was Charles Fowler.

Literacy rates were low around 1700, estimated c40%, based on analysis of signatures rather than a cross on

official documents. Buckinghamshire, as a mainly agricultural county, would expect the level of correspondence to be relatively low and therefore there was no great pressure for postal services to expand rapidly.

In 1675, a spur road from the Uxbridge to Oxford Road (itself a spur from the Bristol Road) fed mail to Amersham. Some years later, Amersham was linked to Beaconsfield to provide a feed from the North. It was not until 1711, however, that an Act of Queen Anne officially allowed Cross Post routes. This enabled shorter and cheaper routes avoiding London to be used officially. Letters would be left at the Receiving House to be collected when people "went into town". Mileage postmarks were introduced from 1784 and the first recorded for Amersham is 29 AMERSHAM in 1789 to assist in calculating the charge due. It was usual at this stage to seek payment upon delivery rather than at the point of posting. The mileages were often inaccurate and a re-appraisal in 1801 caused Amersham's mark to become AMERSHAM 31.



In 1790, Amersham became one of the first towns to have a Crown Post Office (though by this time Charles Fowler had been dismissed for "lack of care of his duties"!). This is a significant. Before 1790, Amersham had a Postal Receiving house at the Crown Inn in Market Square. The Crown was an important coaching inn, and letters were brought there and collected by the local postmaster or his staff. The postmaster was the innkeeper, so the postal service was closely tied to the ordinary business of the inn. By 1790, the Post Office was becoming a much more structured national organisation, with designated offices, official postmasters, and scheduled mail routes with dedicated horses and vehicles. The improvement of the roads and the London–Oxford mail coach made it possible for a relatively small town such as Amersham to be integrated much more effectively into the national system.

From 1810 to 1839, Francis Priest, a grocer, cordwainer (a shoemaker who crafts new shoes entirely from new leather) and Parish Clerk, was appointed postmaster. It was during his time in office that additional Cross Posts were established linking Amersham to Rickmansworth and St Albans (in 1829). Later, in 1842,



In May 1840 the first postage stamp in the World, the Queen Victoria Penny Black, was introduced.

a Cross Post was set up with High Wycombe. We have already seen that Cross Posts commenced from 1711.

In 1842, the Great Western Railway began to be used with a mail coach meeting the train to serve Amersham and Oxford. At a later date Amersham became a Post Town with its mileage now recorded as 26 due to a different route being selected. Roads were very rough, poorly maintained and often flooded causing re-routing.



Francis Priest's daughter, Eleanor, succeeded him in 1839, so it would have been during the latter part of her tenure as postmaster that this hand stamp would have been marked on an envelope. Each sorter was allocated a letter, in this case "B", as part of a quality control system.

The Post Office moved from Market Square to 67–69 High Street in 1891 (see top image). The old premises could no longer cope with the rapidly increasing volume of mail, particularly after the introduction of parcel post (which had begun in Amersham in 1883) and the growing popularity of postcards and Christmas cards. The new premises had a proper public office, sorting office, private office and staff room.

Six years later, three sub-Post Offices were opened in Station Road, White Lion Road and Chesham Bois.

The Amersham &District Philatelic Society meets fortnightly at the Large Barn Hall at the Amersham Community Centre. It offers wide support to collectors and an exchange packet operates to sell and buy material. We hold 2 auctions per year and have Watermark Detectors and other items collectors can borrow.

On 13 September we will hold our 4th consecutive Fair in the Community Centre at Chiltern Pools.

See www.stampersham.org.uk for full details, why not join us?

Keith Wright

*As well as Keeper of the Queen's stamps from 1995 to 2003, Charles Goodwyn was president of the Royal Philatelic Society and a member of the Amersham & District Philatelic Society. He was awarded Lieutenant of the Royal Victorian Order by Queen Elizabeth II in 2002 and died in 2015.

ANSWERS

That was the decade that was...

ANSWER 01

1951: 10,894
1961: 14,612

This was an increase of 34.1%.

By way of context, the population of England and Wales was about 44.0 million in 1951 and 46.0 million in 1961, an increase of just 4.5%.

Amersham was still a relatively small town in 1951, the rapid expansion during the decade was around Amersham-on-the-Hill, driven largely by London overspill and improved Metropolitan line commuting.

ANSWER 02

Goya Ltd. After moving to Amersham in 1946, Goya became one of Britain's leading perfume and cosmetics manufacturer, occupying the former Weller's Brewery buildings in Old Amersham. Production expanded to Raans Road in 1952 – they, along with Brazils, were the major local employers.



ANSWER 03

The Red House in Cherry Lane, Old Amersham. Needless to say, a modernist style house with a flat roof in a conservation area did not go down well with Amersham Rural District Council! To gain permission, a pitched roof was added. Ernö Goldfinger reluctantly agreed, but the space created was only ever intended to be an open studio area and there was no staircase to the amended original design.

ANSWER 04

Roald Dahl. "Wisteria Cottage", 89, High Street. In 1951 he left for America, marrying the American actress Patricia Neal in 1953. He returned to the UK, buying Gypsy House, Great Missenden, in 1954. There is one final tenuous connection with Amersham. He died in 1990 and a service at St Peter and St Paul in Great Missenden church, celebrating his life, was led by the Reverend Canon Rosie Harper, wife of Tim Harper, who became the Rector of St Mary's Amersham church in 1997.

ANSWER 05

The Leys. In the post-war period Amersham-on-the-Hill and Chesham Bois were absorbing a burgeoning population and in the mid-1950s the developers Comben and Wakeling bought the Beach Barn land. It was a former army camp where families had been living in refurbished Nissen huts since the end of WWII and it here that the firm built the cul-de-sac, The Leys.



ANSWER 06

A. "Ye Olde Malt Tea House". Its existence illustrates how post-war Britain was transiting to the vibrant youth culture of the late 1950s.



Ye Olde Malt Tea House in the mid-1950s

B. It is where the Amersham Society committee first met on 16th October 1956.

ANSWER 07

Raans County Secondary School. A mixed secondary modern school. It became a boys only school in 1964 when Brudenell's County secondary school for girls opened on Stanley Hill. The two schools merged in 1988 onto the Stanley Hill campus.

So why wasn't the new road called Raans Close? It was built on the former Raans School site, but the road name was chosen to commemorate the **Brudenell** name, which had a much longer historical association with the area than the school itself. The Brudenell family were owners of the Shardeloes estate in the early 1400s.

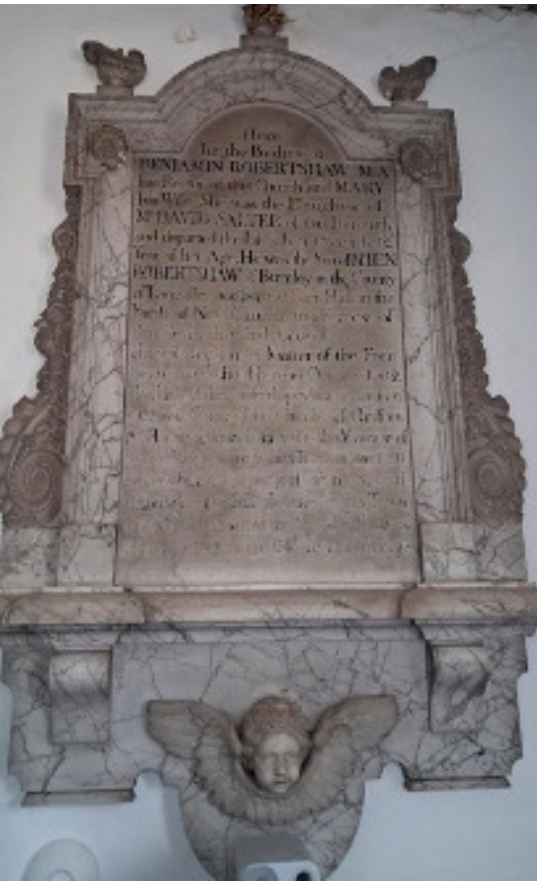
ANSWER 08

Approximately 450,000. This unusually precise figure survives thanks to the Shardeloes building accounts.

The house itself was built using 436,500 common stock bricks, with additional, higher-quality facing bricks used for the principal (front) elevation. The accounts record:

- 436,500 common stock bricks, costing 6 shillings and 9 pence per 1,000 bricks.
- Special large facing bricks for the front of the house, costing 7 shillings and 9 pence per 1,000. Unfortunately, the surviving summary does not state how many of these were used.

Who was Benjamin Robertshaw?



*The monument to Benjamin Robertshaw and his wife * – which can be seen on the west wall of the vestry*

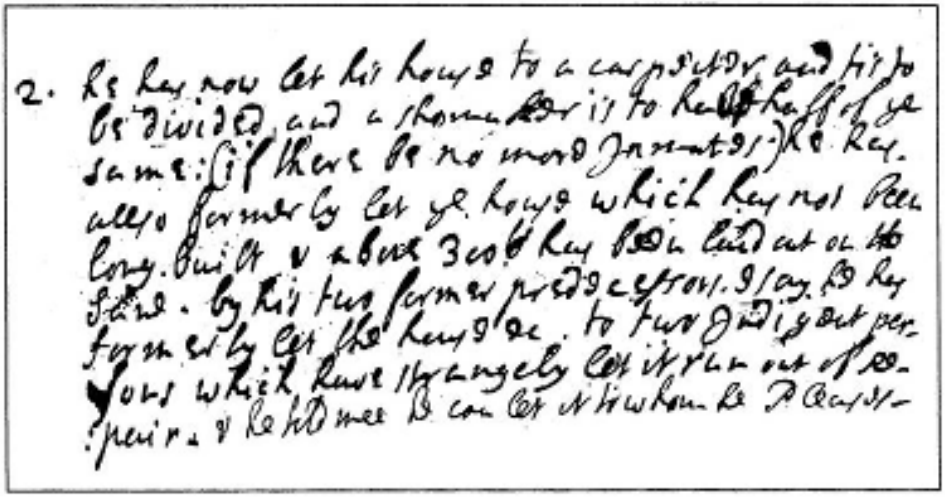
(With thanks to The Rev'd Tim Barnard, Associate Rector of St Mary's for this image)

I certainly didn't know and I'm pretty sure very few of you did either. But what I do know is that we all unknowingly know where he lived – what is now the Old Rectory at the top of Rectory Hill.

A regular contributor to this newsletter, Wendy Tibbitts, has written: Benjamin Robertshaw lies under the vestry floor in St Mary's Church, Old Amersham. He was Rector from 1728 until his death in 1744. In 1732 he began building The Rectory, on Rectory Hill. It took nearly three years to build and even then, he says, "tho' I did not remove from ye Town to live in it till Lady Day 1736."

He describes "the old house" as being "a large rambling building shamefully out of repair". He goes on to say "The front of it stood where ye upper wall of ye Garden now stands, and ye Hall adjoined to those two Rooms which I have left standing; and repaired for an infirmary, or a garden house or for a poor man to live in."

Here Marian Miller takes up his story and whets our appetite for an extra event the Society is mounting as a way to celebrate our 70th Anniversary.



A fragment of Benjamin Robertshaw's memoir - 15 closely written pages. It is preserved in the Bucks Archaeological Society's library in Aylesbury

In early 18th century Amersham, you might expect the Rector to be a younger son of the landed gentry. Not so. In 1728 the man appointed by the Drakes of Shardeloes was from humbler stock. Home-schooled by his father, a schoolmaster in Burnley, Lancashire, Benjamin Robertshaw went on to Oxford where his tutor recommended him to the then Amersham rector, Humphry Drake (no relation to our Drakes) for the post of school-master at Amersham. After taking holy orders Benjamin rose through the clerical ranks, becoming curate at Amersham and Chalfont St Giles, vicar of Penn in 1716 and Amersham rector in May 1728. Benjamin had really fallen on his feet. The rectorship of Amersham was one of the most valuable in the country, being its own manor or franchise, and of course, entitled to the rectorial tithes. But he was not content to sit back and enjoy the profits of his office whilst his curate did all the work. Being someone of strong principles, a high-church man, Jacobite-sympathiser and very much "anti" the Whig establishment, he had a strong sense of right and wrong. He was not afraid to champion the causes he believed in as well as fighting for the rights of others. As a result he got into many arguments, not least with his own bishop after complaints made by a Justice of the Peace from Penn, Daniel Baker.

Benjamin died in 1744, but not before he had written his autobiography. This memoir is one of the many treasures in the library of the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society. Unfortunately, the memoir doesn't tell us much about his personal life except that he married Mary Salter, daughter of David

Salter, churchwarden and tanner of Amersham. They had no children. But he does write about the house which became his lasting legacy to the town, the old Rectory which he built in the 1730s, his part in the establishment of Mrs Elizabeth Bent's charity and his own relationship with the Drake family. Benjamin was that unusual combination, a scholar (he left his voluminous library to the parish) and man of action.

Marian Miller

PS: Marian is the first person to have deciphered and transcribed the whole of the autobiography.

Come and learn more about this fascinating man during an important period in Amersham's history at 8pm on 16th November 2026 at St Mary's Church.

The evening will be a reading of Benjamin Robertshaw's memoir by the actor, Don Crerar. As a very special bonus Earl Howe will read the memorandum of Daniel Baker, branded by Benjamin as "a silly but zealous Justice of the Peace". The production is being directed by well known local actor, Stan Pretty, whom many of you will remember as the director of the Martyrs Plays for the Amersham Museum. The exciting thing about the performance is that it will be the first time his autobiography will have been heard by an audience in Amersham.

*The monument inscription as transcribed by M. J. C. Andrews-Reading, BA, FRNS, FRGS, JP (1998 - 2007)

Here/ lie the Bodies of/ Benjamin Robertshaw M.A./ late Rector of this Church, and Mary/ his wife. She was the Daughter of/ Mr. David Salter of this Borough/ and departed this Life July 9th 1743 in the 62d/ Year of her Age. He was the son of Mr. Ben./ Robertshaw of Burnley in the County/ of mLancaster, and born at Carr-Hall in the Parish of New-Church and Forrest of/ Pendle in the said County./ He was appointed Master of the Free/ Grammar-School here in October 1702./ Had Holy Orders confer'd upon him in Autumn/ 1703, was Curate of this Church and of Chalfont/ St. Giles many years. Instituted to the Vicarage of/ Penn in May 1710 and to this Church in May 1728./ He New-built the Parsonage-House, in 1732, and/ a House for the School-Master in this Town/ in 1736 and departed this Life the 2d day of/ February 1743 in the 64th year of his Age. [wall-tablet; Mrs. Robertshaw buried 12.7.1743; Rev'd Mr. Robertshaw buried 6.2.1743/4 - Parish Register]

Planning

Planning applications are submitted on an almost daily basis. The majority relate to "home improvements". Where these involve listed buildings and/or the Conservation Area, we interrogate them to see what impact they will have on the appearance of the Old Town and make appropriate comments or recommendations where necessary. Then there are the large scale applications which affect the whole town (both Amersham-on-the-Hill and Old Amersham). Again, we scrutinise these and make comments by writing to and lobbying the appropriate authorities.

Here are updates on several recent applications falling into the latter category:

Chiltern Rugby Club's application for, amongst other developments, the building of four covered padel courts and a 60-bed care home

The application was approved, subject to planning conditions and a legal agreement, by the East & South Buckinghamshire Area Planning Committee on 16th June 2026. This was despite residents' concerns and objections relating to the impact the additional traffic would have on road safety and parking. The loss of green space and the effect on wildlife brought about by the size of the care home were other understandable concerns. Ultimately, the committee concluded that the long-term benefits to sport, recreation and care provision outweighed the adverse impacts cited by the residents, provided the development would be controlled by the Section 106* agreement and planning conditions.

Marks & Spencer's application for the construction of a food store on land north of White Lion Road

The application was made on 29th June, but as yet no date has been fixed when the Planning Committee will meet to consider it. There are several strong reasons to oppose the application:

1. The site is Green Belt, so designated to prevent the merging of Amersham with Little Chalfont.
2. It is not currently a retail site and a food store here would need to justify the business case. The concern being that the store would have an adverse impact on Sycamore Road shops.
3. White Lion Road is a busy arterial road, which is particularly busy at school pick up / drop off times and during rush hours. More traffic for a large food store would increase congestion considerably.

This application poses a conundrum. The M&S store in Sycamore Road is undoubtedly popular but it is understood that the lease expires in 2028 and is not being renewed, so the new store would be welcome. On the other hand we want to retain the one piece of Green Belt land between Amersham and Little Chalfont.

Plans to build new homes in Old Amersham

(see Newsletter September 2025)

On 25th July 2025, Hawridge Strategic Land submitted an application to build up to 45 new homes on the parcel of land bounded by Whielden Street, Piggott's Orchard and the bypass. The application was rejected on 16th June this year.

However, it was not an open-and-shut case. There were in fact 30 letters in favour of the development and planning officers argued that whilst the site was technically Green Belt, it qualified as "Grey Belt" under the Government's revised National Planning Policy Framework. Councillors however considered that the proposed development would cause unacceptable harm to Old Amersham's historic setting, the Chilterns National Landscape and the Green Belt (disagreeing with the planning officers), believing it played an important role in protecting the setting and character of the historic town. Members also considered that the potential housing and affordable-housing benefits did not outweigh these environmental and heritage harms. Concerns remained about biodiversity information, breeding birds and replacement parking. Finally, no completed Section 106* agreement was in place to secure affordable housing and necessary infrastructure contributions.

A proposed housing development at Quill Hall Farm

An outline planning application for the building of up to 190 dwellings and a community building (Class F2), including associated car parking, open space, drainage and associated works, was submitted by Redington Capital Ltd on 29th July. As yet no date has been given for the Planning Committee meeting to consider the application.

Interestingly they proposed a much larger development 10 years ago. The circumstances between the two proposals are quite different.

The proposed development did not proceed in 2016 because Chiltern District Council and South Bucks District Council decided not to include the site among their preferred Green Belt releases in the emerging (10 year) Local Plan as they judged it to have a strong sense of openness and an unspoilt rural character. The 2026 proposal faces similar Green Belt and landscape concerns, but additional challenges such as access, traffic, hydrology, biodiversity and environmental impacts.

The general consensus indicates opposition to the application. Amersham Town Council has specifically called for a full Environmental Impact Assessment addressing these issues. One councillor commented: "This application should be refused and it is essential that this proposed development is scrutinised by the full Planning Committee. This application seems to be trying to fit a square peg into a round hole

and so is not the right site for this development". And the NHS Thames Valley Integrated Care Board states on 12th August: "In an absence of a financial contribution, none of the GP practices in the local area would have the capacity to accommodate any new patients from the development. This is contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework, where new developments should support wellbeing and provide necessary infrastructure".

Lidl supermarket in Amersham-on-the-Hill

You can't have failed to notice that demolition of the old Council Offices is under way. But to recap:

On 7th May, Buckinghamshire Council refused planning permission for a supermarket on the site of its former offices on King George V Road in Amersham-on-the-Hill.

Peter Strachan, Buckinghamshire Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Planning said: "The council remains of the view that housing represents the most appropriate form of development for this location and continues to see the site as an opportunity to deliver much needed homes for the local community, in line with adopted planning policy". We shall see.

*A Section 106 agreement is a legally binding agreement between a developer and a local planning authority. It is used to make a development acceptable by requiring the developer to provide or fund facilities that are needed as a result of the development.

John Catton

Draft Local Plan for Buckinghamshire 2045

The Government requires local councils to have a joined-up plan to cover housing needs (which must include 91,000 new homes in Buckinghamshire in the next 20 years – hence the date in the Plan title), employment needs, infrastructure, etc. During the summer, the Council carried out a public consultation (Regulation 19) on its proposals. The Plan is detailed – 450 pages plus 17 Appendices. With an agreed Local Plan, the Council can influence where growth takes place, protect important places and secure the necessary infrastructure. There is even a dream of extending the rail line north of Aylesbury to connect with the new East West line near Winslow.

There will need to be substantial developments to build the extra homes but these are largely around Aylesbury and further north. The Plan aims to protect the Chiltern AONB, proposes building on brown field sites where possible, or, where not possible, using green field rather than Green Belt sites. The Plan references the importance of protecting chalk streams and acknowledges that Buckinghamshire is an area of water stress.

The biggest development in Amersham would be housing on the Sycamore Road Car Park - 140 dwellings, whilst retaining at least 132 public parking spaces! There are no proposals for development on Green Belt sites such as Quill Hall or Whielden Street.

Peter Borrows

Noticeboard

Programme of Talks and Events

Talks are held in the Kings Chapel, 30 High Street, Old Amersham.
(Note: The May talk will be in Lifestyle Centre, Amersham-on-the-Hill)
Coffee, tea and biscuits served from 7:30pm, with talks starting at 8:00pm.

Monday 28th September
Life & Death in a Roman Villa
A talk by Jill Eyers

Monday 26th October
Annual General Meeting
Followed by a talk from a representative of Wycombe Homeless Connection

Monday 16th November
Benjamin Robertshaw
A dramatic reading from the memoir of the 18th century rector of Amersham – see page 34
This is an additional event to our original calendar and will be held in St Mary's church

Monday 30th November
Cassiobury: The Ancient Seat of the Earls of Essex
A talk by Paul Rabbitts
(Please note – this is a change to our original advertised talk)

Monday 25th January
The Austrian Secession & Gustav Klimt
A talk by Rena Hume

Monday 22nd February
Midsummer Music: A Remarkable Local Festival
A talk by Sir Jeremy Dixon

Monday 26th October
AGM and talk
We will be joined by a speaker from the charity 'Wycombe Homeless Connection'

Monday 5th April
A Potted History of Gardens
A talk by Steve Head

Thursday 29th April
Coaches & Coach Horns: Their Story from the Golden Age to the Present Day
A talk by Colin Pawson
To be held in Drake Hall, Lifestyle Centre, Amersham-on-the-Hill

June
Society Outing. Details to be advised later

Website: www.amershamsociety.org
General Enquiries: please email info@amershamsociety.org