

# Thatcham Historical Society

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30<sup>th</sup> November 2009

## Thatcham: an historic town in a changing world

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A new publication on Thatcham's heritage was launched on the evening of the 10th October 2009 at the Frank Hutchings Community Hall. The publication is a direct result of a study that was instigated by the late Peter Allen under his role as the Thatcham Vision Project Manager and has been undertaken jointly by Thatcham Vision ([www.thatchamonline.net](http://www.thatchamonline.net)) and Thatcham Historical Society ([www.thatchamhistoricalsociety.org.uk](http://www.thatchamhistoricalsociety.org.uk)).

Sadly Peter passed away in May and the whole team has put every effort into making this publication something Peter would have been proud of and have dedicated it to him.



Pages from the publication which was jointly published with Thatcham Vision.

A large audience (approx. 80 people) gathered to hear a talk given by Sue Broughton, Duncan Coe, Tony Higgott and Dr Nick Young, giving a brief overview of the contents of the book and history of Thatcham. The talk presented evidence of many topics and perhaps the controversial issue of whether Thatcham is the oldest place in the country.

At the end of the talk, the first three official copies of the publication were presented to Ann Allen, Chris Allen and Steve Allen. The book was then made available to purchase and questions and answers took place over drinks.

**Story continued on page 3**

## Festival of the Arts and Leisure

The society joined the activities for the Thatcham Festival of the Arts and Leisure on the 10<sup>th</sup> October with an exhibition in St. Mary's Church. We would like to extend our thanks to all those who helped to man the stand for the day. The day saw many visitors, enquiries and has since introduced several new members to our society.



Sue Broughton (chair) and Dr Nick Young manning the stand at the Festival of the Arts and Leisure. Photo by Pam Thompson.

## News and Reviews

### The Colonels' Lady and Judy O'Grady

By Nick Young

A packed room greeted Dan Allen on 19<sup>th</sup> October for his talk entitled "The Colonels' Lady and Judy O'Grady." The talk looked at Women in the Victorian Army around the dates of 1850 to 1915. Dan described this as 35 years of research and a lifetime obsession. Dan started his talk by noting that soldiers in the army were not allowed to marry unless they had permission to do so from their superior officer. Even if permission was given, marriage was discouraged. However the higher classes in the army, officers could marry depending on their rank. Captains could marry, majors should marry and colonels must marry.

During this period the soldiers barrack rooms, their quarters, would typically hold 120 single men. However, the four corners of the room were curtained off for married couples to occupy. This would be used by the husband and wife and also any children.

This situation led Captain Scott to write a pamphlet about the army's need to provide decent quarters for married soldiers. For this he was reprimanded. It did lead to changes though with some officers setting up quarters for their married soldiers. For example in 1860 at Fort Widley quarters were set-up for married soldiers. Although an improvement, soldiers and their families still shared their quarters. There would be 3 families sharing a single kitchen and dining area with each family only getting one bed each. Things would improve though and between 1880 and 1960, Borden in Hampshire started to build housing for their soldiers.

Life for the wives and children did improve as well, especially as Queen Victoria was a child of the army. Dan also noted that Queen Victoria, being the daughter of a soldier, mother of a soldier, Queen of an empire, she deserved a military funeral. Indeed she was the first monarch to have a military funeral.

The Royal Military Asylum was set-up in 1809 by the "Grand Old Duke of York" to take in orphaned children of soldiers. Initially taking both boys and girls, although later only taking in boys who could be led back into military service. It was not until the 1970's that girls were taken back in.

Dan mentioned that women in the Victorian army were expected to go overseas on missions and to help out with nursing, washing, etc. There were expected to be 6 women for every 100 soldiers when abroad at a time of war. Warrant officers were even allowed to take their wives for which quarters were provided for.

It was when the army was abroad that women made a name for themselves. Florence Nightingale is the most obvious although there are others including Mary Seacole, a Jamaican lady set-up various enterprises including a hotel in Kingston and Panama, which made her extremely wealthy. Although women were not allowed in the army, this did not stop them from getting in. One, Ms Davies who joined disguised as a man under the name Christian Davies,

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*"marriage was discouraged"*

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*"soldiers and their families still shared their quarters"*

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*"Mary Seacole, a Jamaican lady set-up various enterprises"*

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joined in order to find her husband. Another, Dr James Barry suddenly died in 1865 an autopsy finds that he is actually a she and has had children at some stage in her life.

A vote of thanks was given by Sue Broughton (chair) and refreshments followed.

## Thattham: an historic town in a changing world (cont.)

### Dedication

The book is dedicated to the memory of Peter Allen. There are few people that can make such a positive impression on the people they meet as Peter did, especially across all the different age groups and topics that he did. Peter managed to enhance the community through his teaching at the Kennet School, through his involvement with various society's and projects including the Thattham Historical Society, Thattham Vision, U3A, Thattham Film Club and the Bluecoats School. Thattham is truly a better place thanks to the work that Peter has accomplished and put in place. Peter is a man the team have been honoured to know, privileged to work with and truly proud to call friend.

### The Book

The publication summarises the historical processes and events that have resulted in the town we know today. It also highlights some areas that many might not recognise as 'heritage', but which are fundamental to the form and character of the town. The publication aims to not only highlight the rich history of Thattham, but also to identify features or areas of Thattham that should be preserved. It provides the historical context from which the town can plan for the future, ensuring that current residents understand that the place they live in has deep roots and that the decisions we take today will impact on the quality of life and sense of place for future residents.

The publication, a 72 page soft back book, is split into four main sections:

- **Thattham – The oldest place in the country?** By Peter Allen
- **Transport & Industry** By Dr Nick Young
- **The development of Thattham in the 20th century** By Sue Broughton
- **Historic Buildings and Monuments** By Tony Higgott

### Availability

The book, which is currently available directly from the Thattham Town Council or Thattham Historical Society, was not and is not an exercise in making money but one of educating people. Hence the book, at present, costs just £3.00. Money raised will be used to fund further print runs if required. If no further print runs have been needed by October 2010, all money raised will be used to fund a local (not necessarily history, could be a youth club, community centre, or other) project in Peter's memory.



Dr Nick Young presenting part of the talks at the launch event. Photo by Paul Young.

### Where do I get a copy from?

#### **Thattham Town Council**

Address: Council Offices,  
Brownsfield Road,  
Thattham,  
RG18 3HF  
Tel: 01635 863592

#### **Thattham Historical Society**

(c/o Dr Nick Young)  
Tel: 07786392695  
Email: enquiries@thatthamhistorical  
society.org.uk



Mayor Stephanie Steevenson talking at the launch event with Chris Allen. Photo by Paul Young.

## Regulars

This section contains information and articles, which will be published every issue. If anyone has any suggestions, events, and publication details or would like to provide some input for an article, please do not hesitate to get in contact with us.

### Upcoming Events

DECEMBER 2009						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

JANUARY 2010						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

### Events for December 2009

10<sup>th</sup> December, **The West Berkshire Living Landscape**, Jacky Akam  
Newbury Society.  
7:45 pm - URC Hall, Cromwell Place, Newbury.

11<sup>th</sup> December, **Scenes of Crime**, Ken Wells  
Newbury District Field Club  
2:30 pm in the Council Chamber, Newbury Town Hall

19<sup>th</sup> December, **Fromelles: the excavation of the Australian war graves**, Victoria Burbridge  
Berkshire Archaeological Society.  
Venue not now at present. See [www.berksarch.co.uk](http://www.berksarch.co.uk) for more details.

### Events for January 2010

8<sup>th</sup> January, **The History of Silver**, Mr R Styles  
Newbury District Field Club  
2:30 pm in the Council Chamber, Newbury Town Hall

16<sup>th</sup> January, **Investigating Land-use and Settlement on the Berkshire Downs in the Later Prehistoric and Romano-British Periods: A 21st Century Approach**, Paula Levick, Oxford. University (at RISC)  
Berkshire Archaeological Society.  
Most lectures take place on Saturday afternoons in the R.I.S.C. premises, 35 - 39 London Street, Reading RG1 4PS.

25<sup>th</sup> January, **Annual General Meeting**  
Thatcham Historical Society  
Meeting starts at 7.30pm in the Sixth form block at Kennet School, Thatcham.

26<sup>th</sup> January, **Newbury Borough Police**, Dick Godfrey  
Newbury District Field Club  
7:30 pm in St John's Parish Room

27<sup>th</sup> January, **"Tommy"**, Prof Richard Holmes  
Hungerford Historical Association.  
Meetings are normally held at 8.00pm in The Corn Exchange, Hungerford

## Readers Enquiries

The society continually receives enquiries through various channels. This section is intended to help the society members who get such enquiries to provide more detailed replies. The enquirers contact details are kept private, unless permission has been given to make them public. All feedback will be passed back to the enquirer, acknowledging your input. Some success stories will be included in future newsletters. If you can possibly provide any help in responding to any of these enquiries, please contact **Nick Young** via email at enquiries@thatchamhistoricalsociety.org.uk.

### Northway's and Minns's of Berkshire

I am a relative of the Northway's and Minns's of Berkshire/Oxfordshire. I am working on my Ancestry to leave an account of family to my children. Can you tell me how I may gather more information regards these ancestors i.e., stories, history.

Thank you.  
Sincerely, June

### Cooper's Cottage

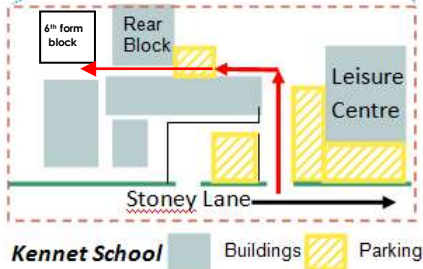
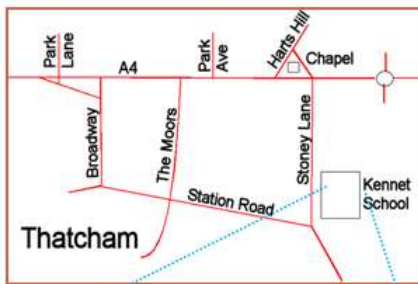
I am researching Bristol stage coaches, and am particularly interested in Edward Fromont and Thomas Cooper, both of Thatcham and important coach masters. I am aware from books about Thatcham that Cooper's Cottage has been demolished, but would be most grateful if you could tell me whether there are any views of it.

Best wishes,  
Dorian.

### Local buses, charabancs or coaches

Do you have any photos of local buses, charabancs or coaches of the 1920's and 1930's, including outings? I am seeking these to aid my research into local bus and coach operators for a forthcoming book. If you have any such photos please send them and I will return them promptly after copying.

Please send to: **Paul Lacey**, 17 Sparrow Close, Woosehill, Wokingham, Berkshire, RG41 3HT or call 0118 979 4097



## About the Thatcham Historical Society

The Society was formed in 1967, with the aim of promoting an interest in the local history of Thatcham and surrounding areas. In addition, more general historical matters are of interest to the society and its members. Members have differing levels of involvement with some carrying out research into topics with the intention of publishing their results and others just being content to enjoy the monthly speakers and activities. The meetings are held at the Kennet Secondary school:

Sixth Form Block  
Kennet School, Thatcham

### What we do

Our society exists to promote an interest, not only in the local history of Thatcham and district, but also in historical matters in general. One way we aim to do this is by arranging a regular series of talks by invited speakers throughout the year. We try to ensure that we have a wide range of subject matter in the talks by interpreting "historical" relevance very freely. Past talks have covered reports of visits to the ancient civilisations of the Middle East and South America, aspects of industrial, transport and agricultural history, as well as aspects of the local history of Thatcham and District. The latter, where possible, are given by speakers who are involved in local research. Most talks are illustrated by slides and some have given members a chance to identify (or guess at!) the purpose of certain historical artefacts from local collections.

We organise a day trip each summer to a place, which not only has strong historical associations, but also more general interest, since we invite member's friends and relations to join us. For instance Rochester, Bristol and Southampton have been visited in recent years. An afternoon guided tour of a local town or place of interest is often organised in the autumn.

### Projects

Another way in which we follow our aim is by initiating and encouraging research into the history of Thatcham and its surroundings. Currently we have a group working on the production of an index of maps covering Thatcham from the earliest available, indicating where they may be seen. Another group has recorded the inscriptions on Thatcham gravestones and is finishing recording those at Cold Ash. A further group has produced and published "*Thatcham over 2000 Years*", a chronology of events in Thatcham from the earliest times to the year 2000. Copies of this book are still available. Any member wishing to help in a project is always welcome, as are any suggestions for future research. Such involvement is of course entirely voluntary.

### Becoming a member

The annual subscription fee is currently £7. This allows you to attend all of the series of talks we arrange each year and includes refreshments at the meetings. It also includes the refreshments at our AGM and social evening. The costs of any excursions or visits would be extra. Visitors can also come along to any of our meetings at a cost of £1.50 per person per meeting. This also includes refreshments. If you are interested please come along to one of our meetings, you will be very welcome. You can join at any meeting, or just pay as a visitor.



Members and friends of Thatcham Historical Society arriving at Penrhyn Castle, 2006. Photo by Ann Allen.