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Special Interest Articles:

- Next speaker meeting is on **Monday 25th April** and is titled "Exhibits from **Wroughton Science Museum**" by **Keith Brown**

2004, A Successful Year!

Members of the society recently heard, at the Annual General Meeting, that 2004 has been one of the most successful years in the societies history. Indeed, Alec Birch described the year as "*the most active society we have ever had.*" There were 80 members of the society in 2004, which has been increasing steadily over the last few years, however this appears to be a record for the society. See the full report on page 2.

“ *the most active society we have ever had.* ”

Blue Coat School Charity

In September 2004 the Blue Coat School Charity, which has officially been a registered charity since November 2004, put forward an application to the Architectural Heritage fund, which was accepted in December. The grant is being used to conduct Feasibility studies in order to determine the amount of work that is required.

The Charity also held a concert in November 2004, where they raised over £400 to aid the restoration work that will be required to restore the building.



The Charity are releasing two questionnaires, see <http://www.oldbluecoatschool.org.uk/feedback/>, to assess the opinion of what local people and organisations may want to use the building for. Please visit the site, or speak to Chris Turner for more information.

Hartshill Quarry Publication

The society learned of an Iron Age site located at Hartshill Quarry from Mark Collard of Cotswold Archaeology on the 29th November 2004. Mr Collard has recently published some of his findings in number 195 of "*Current Archaeology*" magazine. To order copies of this edition, visit www.archaeology.co.uk or phone 08456 447707. The article states that the Iron Age started c.700 B.C, but that this site is rewriting this date, pushing it further back into the past, possibly to as early as the 10th Century B.C.

Review of the Annual General Meeting

by David Peacock

Thatcham Historical Society has had the most successful year in its history, the annual meeting heard in January 2005.

Society member Alec Birch said that he had been a member for 30 years, and he described it now as "*the most active society we have ever had.*" He proposed a vote of thanks to the Society's committee for its work over the past year.

*"the most active
society we have
ever had"*

Alec Birch

The annual meeting on January 31st was opened by chairman Dr Ray Asher, who said that membership was steadily increasing, finances were healthy, and that the past year had seen a good set of talks and trips. He mentioned the outing to the Isle of Wight and the five-day trip to the North of England (including Hadrian's Wall), both arranged by former chairman Peter Allen, and said "We are very grateful to Peter for organising these."

He mentioned the society's website (www.thatchamhistoricalsociety.org.uk), and also its publications: a regular newsletter which was up and running thanks to committee member Nick Young, and a more formal publication currently being finalised. He said that subscription was still £6, but that it was possible that this would need to be increased next year to cover the cost of publications.

He also mentioned the progress made in relation to the Bluecoat School, and expressed a hope that out of the current arrangements some form of embryonic museum for Thatcham would emerge. "Thatcham does deserve its own museum," he said. He also thanked Jean Boehm for continuing to produce her scrap book of cuttings relating to Thatcham.

*"Thatcham does
deserve its own
museum"*

Ray Asher

Treasurer Colin Benham reported healthy finances, with a small profit made over the last year as a whole. He said the society had 80 members, continuing a steady rise over several years.

Ray Asher was re-elected chairman, with Sue Broughton as the new treasurer and Keith Benjamin the new secretary. The committee members are Peter Allen, Colin Benham, Val Bray, Ann Davies, Carolyn Ellis, Barry Franklin, Tony Higgott, Joyce Hoile, David Peacock, Chris Turner, David Wallis, Alf Wheeler and Nick Young.

The business part of the meeting was followed by a social evening, with members contributions creating a buffet and the society providing the drinks. Over 50 members attended and a raffle was organised by Joan Birch.

Review of the previous speaker meeting

by David Peacock

A father and son team of local mapmakers who were closely involved in local life were the subject of February's talk to Thatcham Historical Society (Feb 28, 2005).

Patricia Preece was talking about the 18th century surveyors William and Robert Bedding of Bucklebury, who were responsible for a number of maps of estate land in the Bucklebury area.

She described the 18th century as the golden age of the chain surveyor, a surveyor who used a 100-link metal chain to measure areas of land. The chain they used was 66 feet long, and each link 7.92 inches. One of these surveyors was William Bedding of Bucklebury, who was first encountered by Patricia Preece when she was looking at his map of Buscot Coppice at Bradfield.

‘Survaid for Mr Thos. Snell as followes
Buscot Little Coppes
In statute mesure 6a 2r 33p.’

The measurement was given in statute and other measures, because the same measurement could be understood to indicate different lengths. For example, she said a perch in statutory measure was 16 and a half feet; in woodland measure, a perch was 18 feet; but in customary measure it could vary from 10 feet to 22 feet.

In 1766 William Bedding was measuring another coppice in Bucklebury: ‘The upper end of the furder guley in carbins wood, In stattute measure 2a 2r 21p.’ He seems to have specialised in measuring woodland.

His son Robert Beddings was born in Beenham, but they moved shortly afterwards to Bucklebury. The maps he created jointly with his father show an improvement in spelling and a more sophisticated approach, and Patricia Preece suggested that he may have attended the Bluecoat School established by Lady Frances Winchcombe in Thatcham.

As an example, one map of 1796 shows the arrangement of drains at Lower Farm in Bradfield. Another was ‘A Plan of the Pieces of ground called The Dairies in the parishes of Tidmarsh and Englefield...’

William Bedding died about 1804, and Robert continued, valuing timber and measuring coppices. He wore a white coat and chimney pot hat, and his cottage was a modest building near the Blade Bone, which has long since gone.

He was known to have organised the Bucklebury Revels, and in particular the backword contests. These were fights in which the contestants would aim sticks at each others heads, and would score when they drew blood from their opponent. A blow to anywhere other than the head was deemed a foul. The contests were banned after the death of one contestant in 1818, but were later revived.

Robert Bedding's notebook survives, which includes recipes for treating whooping cough, for ink (‘Take 5 ounces of the best nuttgalls...’) and a recipe for dealing with foot-rot in sheep which includes vitriol and turpentine. He vaccinated the villagers against smallpox, he bled them, and he doctored animals. He took people to prison, and attended some courts.

He was also involved in the planting of part of The Avenue. Patricia Preece said that the oaks were originally planted in the 16th century, and more were added in 1822. Robert Bedding was involved in planting these, which were said to commemorate the victory over Napoleon. He died in 1847.

News from West Berkshire Museum

By Lucy Finch

Shaw House project gets go ahead & work starts on site!

On 9 December 2004, West Berkshire Councillors gave the go ahead for the restoration of Shaw House to begin early in the New Year. The larger project covering the whole site will be phased as planning and funding issues for some aspects are not yet confirmed. Phase 1 will restore the house; create a new access of Church Road into a new car park in the south east corner of the site. Phase 2 will involve the construction of replacement sports facilities for Trinity School and the completion of the car park. Phase 3 will restore the historic gardens; this element was already delayed as the Heritage Lottery Fund refused to fund this element as part of the overall project.

At the same meeting Councillors awarded the main contract for the restoration to William Sapcote & Sons Ltd from Birmingham. Founded in 1853, William Sapcote & Sons is an independent and family owned business. The company work on new build, conversion and restoration construction projects. Sapcote's moved on to site early in January and the scaffolding will be erected around the house and work will begin on the roof in the next few weeks.

Oxford Archaeology was awarded the contract for undertaking the watching brief and recording work during the restoration phase. This will develop the work undertaken by Historic Building Surveys Ltd in 2003 and we hope will reveal even more about the history and development of the house.

One of the specific areas of investigation has been the historic interiors of the house as we are keen to know as much about them as possible before we decide how it will be decorated at the end of the restoration. In 2003, paint, plaster and wallpaper samples were taken and analysed. Historic interiors consultant, Allyson McDermott, has been commissioned to take this work further and to draw up schemes for the redecoration.

Regular updates on project progress will be posted on the project website, www.shawhouse.org.uk.

Familiar Friends, Fresh Faces

The Museum's new Art Gallery is now open, with highlights from the Museum's collection of over 400 works of fine art. Over 40 pictures have been selected to cover a range of themes and a variety of media. The exhibition also provides the opportunity to bring to light some of the pictures in need of conservation.

Many of the pictures are *Familiar Friends*, such as Victor Corden's watercolours of the Market Place and "Twilight" by Fred Hall. Others are *Fresh Faces* and have never been on display before including a delightful oil painting of "Ham Mills" which today we know as Newbury Manor.

Three pictures of the now demolished Newbury Guildhall serve to illustrate the importance of preventative and remedial conservation: Joseph Toomer's pencil drawings still show brown staining caused by an earlier backing board, despite remedial work in 1983. The effects of acidic woodpulp are difficult to reverse, but they can be arrested. Pieces like this are invaluable in understanding Newbury's lost heritage.

A small section is devoted to portraits, including one of the finest and earliest of our collection – Dr Stephen Hemsted, surgeon and midwife at East Ilsley. His family originated in the Low Countries, but it was well established in England by the 18th century. Conservation treatment in 2001 restored this naïve portrait to its former vibrant colours.

Local people have always shown a keen interest in the Museum's fine art collection. Last year's exhibition, Newbury: How Times Have Changed which drew on works in the

collection was by far the most popular special exhibition in recent years. Pictures encourage people to recall their memories of what a place was like or what events took place there. We hope to increase our knowledge of several of the pieces in the new gallery through our visitors.

The exhibition also covers Waterways, Countryside, Market Place (Newbury), Street Scenes, The Litten and Local Artists. A catalogue is available at a cost of 75p (£1.75 including p&p).

Pound Street Medieval Cemetery: Initial Findings

Visitors to West Berkshire Museum now have the chance to see a new display following up on the discovery of a medieval cemetery in Newbury last summer.

Several human skeletons were discovered in July 2004, at the junction of Newtown Road and Pound Street in Newbury, during work to widen the pavements. It became clear that a substantial part of a cemetery had been found, most likely relating to the medieval religious complex of St Bartholomew's Hospital.

Oxford Archaeology excavated the site, and their specialists have been studying the skeletons to determine their age, sex and medical history. This is the first time that such a large sample from the medieval population of Newbury has been scientifically examined: fifty nine graves were uncovered.

The new display looks at Oxford Archaeology's initial findings. Not surprisingly for a hospital community, all of the examined skeletons displayed some disease; in many, multiple health problems were present. One particularly unfortunate individual had tuberculosis of the spine, a rampant abscess of one of his teeth (which might have caused meningitis or diseases of the brain) and multiple congenital abnormalities, including an extra rib in his neck.

The display is located in the Museum's archaeology gallery, near to another small display about the Bronze Age gold hoard found near Lambourn in September 2004.

West Berkshire Museum is open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 10:00 until 16:00. It is also open on Wednesday during school holidays. For more information call 01635 30511 or visit www.westberkshireremuseum.org.uk.

New Geology Display Revealed at Reopening

What's a tube of toothpaste doing in a geology display? That could become a familiar question after the Museum's geology collection was given a new lease of life during January closure. Visitor Services & Education Officer, Melanie Parker, wanted to make the display more relevant to people's everyday lives. In its old format you could be forgiven for thinking that rocks and minerals have very little use today. The truth is very different and many of the uses are far more interesting than the obvious use of stone as a building material. The new display shows how minerals such as lapis lazuli, calcite and quartz are used in items as diverse as paint, kitchen cleaner and wrist watches. Drop in to discover some more surprises. Thank you to Andy Whincup for his help with the display.

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.

Events

Wednesday 23rd March, Hungerford Historical Association

Frosts, Freezes & Fairs - 1000 years of famous winters, Ian Currie
Meetings 8.00pm in The Corn Exchange, Hungerford

Tuesday 12th April, Wargrave Local History Society

What's In a Name?, Jean Debney

Jean, a well known family historian and broadcaster, will tell us the meanings of members' surnames

Meetings are at 8 p.m. in the Hannen Room, Mill Green, Wargrave,

Saturday 16th April, Berkshire Archaeological Society

Annual General Meeting and Presidential Address by Prof. Michael Fulford,
Lectures take place on a Saturday afternoon at 2.30pm
in the R.I.S.C. premises, 35 - 39 London Street, Reading RG1 4PS

Thursday 21st April, West Berkshire Museum

Before the Racecourse, Penelope Stokes

Drawing on research for her forthcoming book Penelope Stokes will allow a rare glimpse into local horseracing from 1700 through to 1905 when Newbury Racecourse opened. Find out why racing flourished in the 1700s but by the end of the 1800s it had all but died out.

Lectures take place at Newbury Town Hall, from 7:00 to 8:30, (doors open at 6:45). Tickets will be on sale for the first time at the previous lecture and thereafter from West Berkshire Museum and cost £5.00.

Thursday 21st April, Friends of Newbury Library

AGM and Speaker, Michael Perkin

Meeting is held at Newbury Library, 7.15pm

Friday 22nd April to Monday 25th April, Berkshire Archaeological Society

Spring Tour

For more information, visit: <http://www.berksarch.co.uk/>

Monday 25th April, Thatcham Historical Society

Exhibits from Wroughton Science Museum, Keith Brown

See the back page of this newsletter for location and times.

Wednesday 27th April, Hungerford Historical Association

A Roman Soldier's Letters Home, Mr Nick Griffiths

Meetings 8.00pm in The Corn Exchange, Hungerford

Tuesday 10th May, Wargrave Local History Society

The Survival of Lowland British Words and Phrases, Michael Bayley

Michael will tell us about the spoken language, as used by local farm workers, 100 years or so ago.

Meetings are at 8 p.m. in the Hannen Room, Mill Green, Wargrave,

Thursday 19th May, West Berkshire Museum

Building Belief: Local Church Architecture, Dr David Peacock,
The churches of West Berkshire represent many of the key fashions in church architecture. These provide a basis for Dr Peacock's fascinating lecture looking at the rare Saxon churches through to Victorian styles.

Lectures take place at Newbury Town Hall, from 7:00 to 8:30, (doors open at 6:45). Tickets will be on sale for the first time at the previous lecture and thereafter from West Berkshire Museum and cost £5.00.

Thursday 19th May, Friends of Newbury Library

An evening with Charles Darwin, Cyril Aydon
Meeting is held at Newbury Library, 7.15pm

Monday 23rd May, Thatcham Historical Society

Living with a Vintage Car, Bob Olive
See the back page of this newsletter for location and times.

Wednesday 25th May, Hungerford Historical Association

The Life of Frederick Lindemann, Viscount Cherwell, Adrian Fort
Meetings 8.00pm in The Corn Exchange, Hungerford

Thursday 16th June, West Berkshire Museum

Local Societies Update
Find out about the work of local history/archaeology societies in West Berkshire. A number of these groups are undertaking some very exciting projects that contribute to increasing our understanding of the history of West Berkshire.

Lectures take place at Newbury Town Hall, from 7:00 to 8:30, (doors open at 6:45). Tickets will be on sale for the first time at the previous lecture and thereafter from West Berkshire Museum and cost £2.50.

Monday 27th June, Thatcham Historical Society

A History of Greenham Common Airbase, Jonathan Sayers
See the back page of this newsletter for location and times.

The society on-line

We are continually developing the web site and we would welcome any comments or suggestions you have on how we could improve the site.

Statistics

The last year has seen an immense amount of visitors to our website. Between the 1st January 2004 and 31st December 2004 we have received over 11,000 unique visitors. Most visitors (58%) originate from the UK, 30% from the US, 2% from Canada, 2% from Australia, the remaining 8% from all other parts of the world including China, Germany, France, New Zealand, etc. Between 1st January 2005 and 18th March 2005 we have received 2,800 visitors.

New links:

Shaw House Restoration Project: www.shawhouse.org.uk.



"The society online at
[http://www.thatcham
historicalsociety
.org.uk](http://www.thatchamhistoricalsociety.org.uk)."

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 nick@thatthamhistoricalsociety.org.uk.

Acknowledgements

In the last edition of the Newsletter, Pam Best requested information about a murder from 1845. Pam and Myself would like to thank Mrs Julie Goddard from Newbury for her assistance on this matter.

Train Times

I am carrying out research for a book and I wondered whether anyone in your society would have information about the train service between Thattham station and London (Paddington, presumably) in the late 1880s, i.e. approx. frequency, journey time, timetable etc. Also, whether you could travel to London directly, or would you have had to change at Reading? I would be most grateful for any information you can provide.

Regards
David Briston

Stephen Clarkson and Family

We have a family Will of Stephen Clarkson 1848 who owned a Pub at Bucklebury and also owned cottages at Cold Ash. This Will is all the info we have on the family. Any additional history would be most appreciated.

We have sent the Will we have typed out to our best ability for your collection. We can send a photo copy of the original if you would like a copy.

Our connection to this family is through Martha Clarkson bapt. 23-11-1800 at Stanford-Dingley who married George Webb (no date or place known.) Their first child was bapt. in Stedham.

Yours sincerely Barbara and William Webb.

The Will is available on request by contacting Nick Young (see top of this page).

The Lawrence's

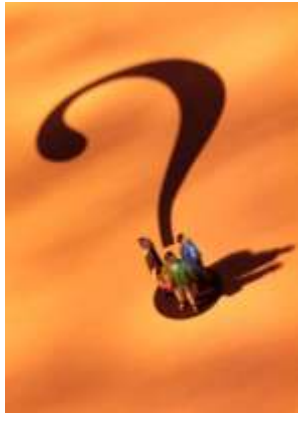
The family I am trying to trace are the Lawrence's. I am the great great granddaughter of Luke Lawrence born Thattham about 1818. Luke immigrated to Australia in 1852. Luke's father was Thomas Lawrence and his brothers were John and James. From your website I have found that they lived at Lodge Farm and Marsh House.

John Lawrence and Eliza Lawrence were living at Marsh House in 1881. John was born 1822 in Thattham and died 1895 and is buried in St Mary's churchyard. Thomas Lawrence born about 1766 in Thattham and died 1831 in Thattham. His wife was Susanna Franklin who was born Thattham 1787 and died 1847. Both Thomas and Susanna are buried in St Mary's churchyard. Susanna Franklin's parents were Anthony Franklin and Hannah Selwood. (I do not know where they are buried)

Thomas' father was John Lawrence born about 1729 and died 1796 and is buried St Mary's churchyard. Thomas' mother was Elizabeth ? she died 1814 and is buried St Mary's churchyard. Thomas had three surviving children: John of Marsh House, Luke who came to Australia and James whom I no nothing about.

Any information or help you could give me about the family or where they lived would be appreciated.

Lindsey



"All feedback will be passed back to the enquirer, acknowledging your input."

"John Lawrence and Eliza Lawrence were living at Marsh House in 1881."

The Hicks and Francis Families

I have been researching my family history for some years and all roads lead to Thatcham! While I have a fair collection of data and pictures, a couple of vital loose ends remain concerning the Hicks/Francis family tie.

I have some old photo's of some Thatchamite's. One is of my grandfather, Frank Francis, who was brought back to Thatcham from Dartford by his maternal grandparents, The Hicks, who were paper mill workers, moved (Thatcham-Dartford-Thatcham) to escape the smallpox epidemic in London. During which, his parents died. Out of interest, a number of Thatcham residents moved up to Dartford and lived close to each other near the mill, Denness, etc.

He was taken in at the Bluecoat School, and then provided with an indenture with a Newbury Baker. I have his indentures! Which state they provided the support for him to be indentured.

The first photo I have of him was taken in 1874. The one taken in Newbury is when he is aged 15 (see photo on the left). He moved to Cookham, soon buying the Cookham Village Bakery from Mr Randall. He married Bertha Denness at the Methodist Chapel, Chapel Lane, 9th September 1897. The sketch of him by Sir Stanley Spencer, who lived opposite his shop, was a subject on Antiques Road Show last year.

My Great-Great-grandfather, William, was the result of a forced marriage, and he was left at Theale as a baby while his father, Samuel, moved about the country with his wife, and his other partner, a lady he had picked up in Ireland, named Cuggan. Samuel died in Windsor, 1878. Cuggan returned to Ireland, and his wife died in Halifax of all places. William, entered the papermaking mills close to Thatcham along with many other local men according to the list I have. Why the paper trade in the area died, I have no idea, but I have found about 10 of them decamped to the paper mill at Dartford. Where my Grandfather, Frank, was born.

William died in the smallpox epidemic 1877. His wife took Frank to Thatcham with Henry and Elizabeth Hicks (Her mother and father) to escape, however, I believe she died on the coach as it reached Thatcham and is so registered. Frank then stayed with the Hicks, who lived next door to the Denness's. After finishing school, Frank learnt his trade in Newbury, then got his own business in Cookham, returned to Thatcham, and married the girl next door, Bertha Denness.

I would be interested to know if Frank was one of the first to be married at the Chapel under the new laws! And, what became of his mothers (Mary Anne Hicks) former husband, Edward Richardson, a local lad who she married some 18 months before Frank.

Mike Swan

Mr Swan has provided the society with many additional materials. Please contact Nick Young if you would like to see copies of them.



"Frank aged 15"



"Tom and Mable Denness. Wedding party in their back-yard"

About the Thattham Historical Society...

The Society was formed in 1967, with the aim of promoting an interest in the local history of Thattham 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:

Room E8/9, Rear Block
Kennet School, Thattham

What We Do ?

Our society exists to promote an interest, not only in the local history of Thattham 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 Thattham 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.

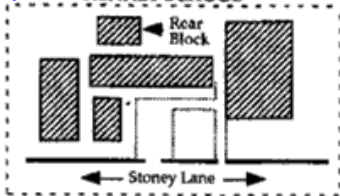
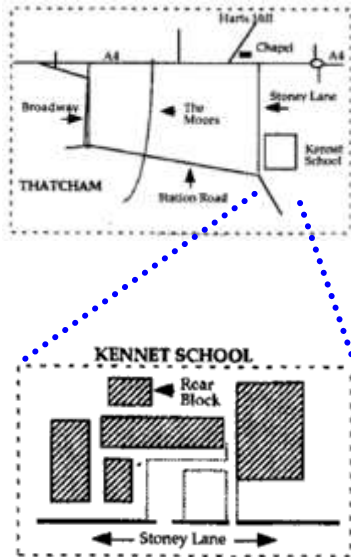
We also organise a day trip each summer to a place, which not only has strong historical associations, but also more general interest, since we invite member's friends and relations to join us. For instance Rochester, Bristol and Southampton have been visited in recent years. An afternoon guided tour 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 Thattham and its surroundings. Currently we have a group working on the production of an index of maps covering Thattham from the earliest available, indicating where they may be seen. Another group has recorded the inscriptions on Thattham gravestones and is finishing recording those at Cold Ash. A further group has produced and published "Thattham over 2000 Years", a chronology of events in Thattham 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 £6 per year. 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.



"Our society exists to promote an interest, not only in the local history of Thattham and district, but also in historical matters in general."



*Members at the AGM,
Photo by Ann Allen,
January 2004*