



# Thatcham Historical Society

VOLUME 6 ISSUE 1

30<sup>th</sup> March 2009

## Annual General Meeting 2009

By Nick Young

### Inside This Issue

- 2 News and reviews
- 4 Upcomming Events
- 6 Readers Enquiries
- 8 About the Thatcham Historical Society

A packed room greeted the chair (Sue Broughton) at our AGM on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> January 2009. Sue thanked the members for the continued support of the society and fellow committee members for their hard work in promoting and organising events over the past year. Sue reviewed the events of the past year and invited comments from the audience. Trips were also mentioned including a coach party of 51 members and friends who made a trip to St. Fagan's Historical Village in July.

A programme of speaker meetings for 2009 was circulated and discussed. Sue also talked about other projects the society is undertaking including a re-print of the book "*Thatcham Over 2000 Years*", recording of monuments at Midgham Church, updating of St. Mary's Churchyard monumental inscriptions and the oral histories project.

The officers were elected as:

- Chair: Sue Broughton
- Treasurer: Mervyn King
- Secretary: Alf Wheeler

Additional members of the committee were (re)elected as:

- Dr Ray Asher;
- Val Bray;
- Barry Franklin;
- Tony Higgott (Librarian);
- Joyce Hoile
- Peter Lavarack;
- Dr Nick Young (Newsletter, Journal and Website Editor).

## News and Reviews

### Art of the Wheelwright

By Nick Young

A large audience gathered for tonight's meeting (23rd February 2009) to listen to a talk given by Ted Fox on the "Art of the Wheelwright"

Mr Fox described himself as "A country peasant that makes tea for his wife". The talk he presented showed that his skills and knowledge far exceed this description. Mr Fox taught agriculture at Berkshire College of Agriculture and set-up as a Wheelwright after being made redundant at 50 from the college.

It is not known exactly when or where the wheel was developed but it is generally believed to have been developed in either Egypt or Mesopotamia around 6000 years ago. At this point it would have been simply the end of a tree trunk cut down. It is known that the Egyptians did create bronze wheels for chariots and that the Romans created the first front turning axel.

Mr Fox noted that the word "Spoke" originally meant something different to what it is used for today. Originally it was a metal rod used by miners to place in to a wheel to break carts. The word was then used to refer to the beams/rods linking the hub to the wheel rim. There are many types of spokes in use and the type used depends on many factors including the size of the wheel and intended use.

In 1888 John Dunlop developed the pneumatic tyre. He failed to get his idea accepted in the UK and so took his idea to America where it was developed. However, its first use was on horse carts and not cars.

Mr Fox showed, and allowed the audience to examine, many of the tools of the trade. He also noted that many different types of wood were used including Elm, Oak and Ash. The type used often depended on what was available locally. All of the components of the wheel were described and Mr Fox showed how these all fitted together. However, to hold the wood in place, a tyre is used. This is made from Iron or steel in some of the modern industry. Originally these would have been forge welded to form a circle although more modern welding methods can be used today. The tyre would have been slightly smaller than the wheel in order to compress it and hold it together. In order to fit the tyre to the wheel, the tyre would have been heated up to cause it to expand.

Mr Fox noted that when he started in the industry 25 years ago there were some 300 wheelwrights but today there are only 7 or 8 good wheelwrights.

A vote of thanks was given by committee member Peter Lavarack and refreshments followed.

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## Journal of Thatcham Historical Society

We hope to publish the second issue of our very own Journal later this year. We are still happy to receive any submissions of articles for inclusion. Submissions can digital or handwritten, we are more than happy to scan images, negatives, slides, etc. And any other work that may be required for your article.

For further information, please speak to committee member Nick Young.

## Library

We would like to remind all member that our library has a wide range of books, including:

- Berkshire old and new;
- Fires of Windsor Castle;
- Tales of Oxford;
- Thatcham 1895 – 1995: Through the Eyes of a Clerk.

As you can see, subjects are varied and cover a wide range of areas and topics. There are over 260 items in the library. As a member, you can book these items out and take away with you.

For more information, please speak to our librarian, Tony Higgott.

## Website News

In January of this year our website, [thatchamhistoricalsociety.org.uk](http://thatchamhistoricalsociety.org.uk), was given an early spring clean. Various items have been upgraded and a new look given to it. This should make access easier.

The number of unique visitors to our website increased by 196% (a total of 3,481 unique visitors) compared to 2007 viewing a combined total of 20,422 pages (a 190% increase on 2007). Visitors originated from the UK (74%), USA (10%), Australia (2%) and many more.

Our news items and events, along with other groups, are now being used and displayed by the new local community website for Thatcham, which is part of the Thatcham Vision. The website can be accessed at [thatchamonline.net](http://thatchamonline.net).

## National History Month

National history month, May, will be here shortly. Unfortunately last year we were unable to do anything, however, this year we are. Every day in May we will be putting a post on to our website with a historical fact about Thatcham (or the surrounding area). So that's 31 facts in total.

For those without internet access, we will put the facts in the next newsletter, but we are also hoping to have these facts published in the media (newspaper and/or radio). We will let you know about these extra channels in our April meeting.



A close-up view of our updated website.



[thatchamonline.net](http://thatchamonline.net), local community website.

## 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

### Events for April 2009

4<sup>th</sup> April (2.30pm – 3.00pm), People of the Thames gallery talk  
Museum of English Rural Life, Redlands Road, Reading  
 For more information visit [www.merl.org.uk](http://www.merl.org.uk), call 0118 378 8660 or email [merlevents@reading.ac.uk](mailto:merlevents@reading.ac.uk).

7<sup>th</sup> April, **Annual General Meeting and Jack of Newbury**, Dr David Peacock, Friends of Newbury Library

The AGM is on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> April 7.15pm at Newbury Library. Following the AGM our speaker for the evening is Dr David Peacock, a well known local historian. David is an expert on the life and times of Jack of Newbury - his subject for the evening. You may have heard the legends about John Winchcombe - now come and find out what's true!

14<sup>th</sup> April, **The Old Place**, Angela Spencer-Harper  
Wargrave Local History Society. Meetings are at 8 p.m. in The Hannen Room, Mill Green, Wargrave.  
 Angela is returning to tell us this time about historical artefacts found in south-east Oxfordshire, as recorded in her latest book.

22<sup>nd</sup> April, **Inventories and Social History**, Mrs. Joan Dils  
Hungerford Historical Association. Meetings 8.00pm in The Corn Exchange, Hungerford. For more information visit [www.hungerfordhistorical.org.uk](http://www.hungerfordhistorical.org.uk).

25<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> April, Forget me knot - knot tying with Ken Nelson  
Museum of English Rural Life, Redlands Road, Reading  
 For more information visit [www.merl.org.uk](http://www.merl.org.uk), call 0118 378 8660 or email [merlevents@reading.ac.uk](mailto:merlevents@reading.ac.uk).

27<sup>th</sup> April, **Squires of West Berkshire and their Estates**, John Trigg  
Thatcham Historical Society, 7.30pm (see back page for location details, NOTE: NEW LOCATION – SIXTH FORM BLOCK).

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31						

## Events for May 2009

12<sup>th</sup> May, **Ruscombe Wood**, Stephen Loyd

Wargrave Local History Society. Meetings are at 8 p.m. in The Hannen Room, Mill Green, Wargrave.

Stephen will tell us about the natural history and conservation work being done in Ruscombe Wood.

18<sup>th</sup> May, **The past in Stone and Metal**, Malcolm Langford

Thatcham Historical Society, 7.30pm (see back page for location details, NOTE: NEW LOCATION – SIXTH FORM BLOCK).

26<sup>th</sup> May (2pm – 3pm), Pocketful of posies

Museum of English Rural Life, Redlands Road, Reading

For more information visit [www.merl.org.uk](http://www.merl.org.uk), call 0118 378 8660 or email [merlevents@reading.ac.uk](mailto:merlevents@reading.ac.uk).

27<sup>th</sup> May (2pm – 3pm, 3.15pm – 4.15pm), Picture this!

Museum of English Rural Life, Redlands Road, Reading

For more information visit [www.merl.org.uk](http://www.merl.org.uk), call 0118 378 8660 or email [merlevents@reading.ac.uk](mailto:merlevents@reading.ac.uk).

27<sup>th</sup> May, **Burial Grounds of London**, Leslie Grout

Hungerford Historical Association. Meetings 8.00pm in The Corn Exchange, Hungerford. For more information visit [www.hungerfordhistorical.org.uk](http://www.hungerfordhistorical.org.uk).

28<sup>th</sup> May (2pm – 4pm), Beautiful barges

Museum of English Rural Life, Redlands Road, Reading

For more information visit [www.merl.org.uk](http://www.merl.org.uk), call 0118 378 8660 or email [merlevents@reading.ac.uk](mailto:merlevents@reading.ac.uk).

29<sup>th</sup> May (11am – 4pm), Super scarecrow

Museum of English Rural Life, Redlands Road, Reading

For more information visit [www.merl.org.uk](http://www.merl.org.uk), call 0118 378 8660 or email [merlevents@reading.ac.uk](mailto:merlevents@reading.ac.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@thatchamhistoricalsociety.org.uk](mailto:nick@thatchamhistoricalsociety.org.uk).

### Dibley Family

Could you please help with my research. Dibley family is buried at St Mary's Greenham. Would greatly appreciate inscriptions and graves relating to Richard Dibley who died 1847 and his wife Elizabeth d. 1855. Seems most of the family are buried in this graveyard. I am from Australia and deep into family history. Any help would be fantastic

thanks  
Sue

**THS:** We have checked our Greenham records for Dibleys and have found none. Do you have any Dibley relatives. Please let us know.

### Aeroplane at the Corn Exchange

Hi, I am contacting you and your members to see if there is any truth to a family story. Allegedly my great grandfather (John Codling) and some other people tried or may have succeeded in building an aeroplane prior to WW1 when aviation was a new and exciting thing. One rumour is that it was shown outside the Corn Exchange in Newbury and they may have attempted to fly it. I would like to know if anybody has come across this story or if there is any record of it happening. If it is true, then the story of where the aircrafts engine is buried must be true as well. I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards  
Steve Martin

### Thatcham Special Constabulary

My father was a wartime Special as was my Grandfather. I have found what I think is a cap badge from then, with the Kings crown although it could, I suppose be a collar badge. I am wondering if anyone has memories of those days when Thatcham had a complement of about 40 police officers, both regular and Special. I know the badge had a felt backing but cannot remember if it was red or blue. My father Bernard James Denness was honorary treasurer of the police club and of Midgham football club. He worked at the Mills for 52 years in the offices and rode round Thatcham on his bike collecting the rent. He lived in Northfield Road.

## Chapel Street

Hello, I was wondering if you knew the age of 80 Chapel Street! I've been searching the internet all day and haven't really got far? So was wondering if you could help me out? Well I had a surveyor go in..... And cause of the rafters..... He would say 1840 .....

## Owens of Hatch Gate – An Update

Hi, since my contact last year things have moved on somewhat. Just to recap I discovered I had distant relations in the Thatcham area as my couzin had been search for our forebears. I found myself through my work offered a position in Reading. I subsequently found a property in a rural area on Harts Hill Road. I set about searching for anyone with knowledge of my distant relations. I must admit to being more than midly surprised when I found the areas of Hatchgate where my great grandfather was born and lived with his Parents John and Hannah Owen and several siblings. Hannah who was born Hannah Tidbury in Ashmore Green and John were the grandparents of William Howse the VC winner from the Bore War.

Hannah who died in the Alms houses on Chapel street in 1908 was the daughter of Charles and Ann Tidbury of Midgham Green. I have traced this line of Tidbury's back to Thomas Tidbury who was born in the area in 1706. I am keen to discuss with anyone with knowledge further back. Since my family tracings have progressed I have been given by my couzin a walkin stick presented to William Owen (Former Bluecoat schoolboy) my great grandfather by Camberwell police. It is made of Ebony with deerhorn handle and has a silver band with an inscribed shield, reading presented to William Owen by the men and officers of camberwell police station for assisting a constable with a dangerous criminal dated 25 of July 1905.

Having studied the farm at Hatchgate Cold Ash where they lived and worked, I have discovered that it borders the farm land where I now live. I have found other descendants of the Tidbury and Owen family spread around the globe and all parts of the UK. I am now writing a novel based on my Forbears and the areas in which they lived and worked and would be keen to discuss with interest anyone who has knowledge of Cold Ash, Ashmore Green, Bucklebury, Henwick, Midgham, Shaw, Thatcham, Colthrop Mill, all farms and the Farming community and working class folk of Victorian times. Any information and geographical layouts circa 1800.

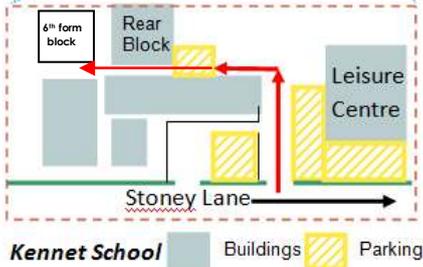
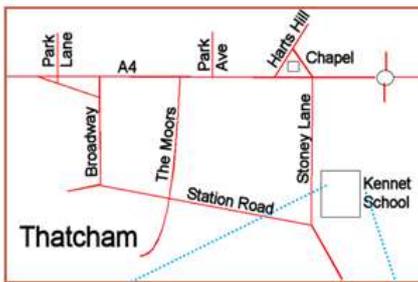
Yours Sincereley  
Clive Owen

## Edward Frost, Thatcham Farrier

Hello

I'm helping a friend to compile her family history and need to find out About, Edward Frost a farrier who lived or worked in Thatcham c 1900-1940, he was married to Florence ? who died about 1919. He apparently worked with Race horses. If anyone could help I'd be very grateful.

Liza



## 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.