

Cholesbury-cum-St Leonards Local history Group

1997/98 NEWSLETTER

Chairman's Introduction

This, our first newsletter is due to the initiative of your Vice-Chairman David Ridgwell aided by George Cobby and is designed to stimulate your interest in the past, especially that of our locality. It comes to you with next season's programme which promises another series of interesting and enjoyable evenings.

We hope you will consider this a worthwhile venture and will be encouraged to contribute to future issues. Meanwhile our thanks go to those responsible for this number and we look forward to meeting you all again in October.

Evelyn Money

Summer Outing - June 20th 1997

Twenty-one members visited the Judges' Lodgings in Aylesbury where we were treated to a very informative and well-researched evening by the County Archivist, Mr Roger Bettridge. The Judges' Lodgings are on the site of the old gaol, (opposite the present Civic Centre), and Mr Bettridge gave us a comprehensive history of the building and of the judicial and civil administration of the County, and we were taken through the principal rooms - the Members' Lounge was most comfortable!

I learned a number of interesting points of local history and local families, and was interested to see a Blomfield ancestor named on the plaque inside the front entrance.

Copies of "A Guide to the Judges' Lodgings" are available in the Library and in the Black Box.

Looking towards the Summer Outing for 1998, please let any member of the Committee know if you have a suggestion to put forward

Shirley Blomfield

The Library

Money from the legacy left to the Society by Horace Brackley was used to buy three new books chosen with the particular idea of helping members who wanted to do their own local research.

SOURCES FOR ENGLISH LOCAL HISTORY *by W B Stephens*

Long recognised as a standard work and first appearing in 1973, this book has been updated. It describes and explains 'the maze of manuscripts and printed sources' which are available for those wishing to research their house, their neighbourhood or community.

ENGLISH LOCAL HISTORY - An Introduction *by Kate Tiller*

A popular guide to discovering the history around us, this book is lively and fully illustrated with photographs, diagrams and drawings. The book aims "to provide a guide which illustrates diversity of the available evidence but which also points to pathways through a distracting jungle of information".

THE LOCAL HISTORIAN'S ENCYCLOPAEDIA *by John Richardson*

This is one of the most popular books written for local historians with sections as varied as 'Coins and Tokens' and 'Roads and Transport' and useful for group or individual projects.

The Group holds a number of other local history publications (Records of Bucks Archaeological Society etc.). Books may be borrowed by members on application to Mrs Paddy Thomas (telephone 01494-758460).

Cholesbury-cum-St Leonards Local History Group

The Group was founded 36 years ago as an amateur society to foster interest in and record the topography and buildings of the Hilltop Villages before 'progress' changed them out of all recognition. A substantial but inevitably incomplete archive of documents, maps and photographs exists but needs regular additions if its value is to be maintained.

The Group is justly famed for its long established series of talks by guest speakers, whether acknowledged experts or enthusiastic amateurs. The emphasis is on subjects local to the Chilterns, supplemented by topics of more general interest.

1997 - 1998 PROGRAMME

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| FRIDAY OCTOBER 3 1997 8.00 pm for 8.15 pm Cholesbury Village Hall | THE PROBLEMS OF HISTORICAL FILMS ADVISING ON "IVANHOE" Mr Christopher Gravett |
| FRIDAY NOVEMBER 7 1997 8.00 pm for 8.15 pm St Leonards Parish Hall | ARCHAEOLOGY, MAPPING & ROMAN ROADS Mr Simon Ware |
| FRIDAY DECEMBER 5 1997 8.00 pm for 8.15 pm St Leonards Parish Hall | THE ORDNANCE SURVEY : PART 2 Mr Paul Riley |
| FRIDAY JANUARY 9 1998* 8.00 pm for 8.15 pm St Leonards Parish Hall | METRO-LAND Mrs Alison Doggett |
| FRIDAY FEBRUARY 6 1998 8.00 pm for 8.15 pm St Leonards Parish Hall | MEMBERS' EVENING Members and visitors are all welcome when some of our members will give short talks on subjects of their choosing |
| FRIDAY MARCH 6 1998 8.00 pm for 8.15 pm St Leonards Parish Hall | HIDDEN BUCKS Miss Jean Archer |
| FRIDAY APRIL 3 1998 8.00 pm for 8.15 pm St Leonards Parish Hall | THE LOWNDES FAMILY OF CHESHAM Mrs Mary Everett |
| FRIDAY MAY 1 1998 8.00 pm SHARP Cholesbury Village Hall | ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING followed by THE VERNEY FAMILY IN THE CIVIL WAR Miss Muriel Easter |

MEMBERSHIP: £4.00 PER ANNUM VISITORS WELCOME: £1.00 PER MEETING
Coffee and Biscuits are served and a collection is taken

* Please note that this is the second Friday in January

About our Speakers

Four of our speakers are "old friends" who have been pleased to accept an invitation to return. They therefore need no introduction, except to new members and visitors who have not had the pleasure of their erudition.

Mr Chris Gravett, of the Royal Armouries, Tower of London, has already given us a well-illustrated talk on Castles and Sieges. His name appeared in the list of credits for BBC TV's serialisation of "Ivanhoe", and he has agreed to talk on the problems of adapting historical films.

Mr Paul Riley's last talk was even more illustrated and illustrative than usual, supplemented as it was by aerial photographs of our villages. Members blessed with normal eyesight were able to enjoy them in 3-D.

Mrs Alison Doggett's choice of subject - Metro-Land - is at the opposite pole from Ancient Countryside last time. She chose it because she had so much enjoyed researching it for her book on the Chilterns. It is some years since we have had a talk on this powerful influence on our region.

Miss Jean Archer's many talks and books on the nooks and crannies of the County's history and geography are legendary, yet there will always be some corner of Hidden Bucks for us to discover.

Mr Simon Ware, like Mr Riley, works for Ordnance Survey and devotes much of his spare time to archaeological surveying.

Mrs Mary Everett is a member of the Chess Valley Archaeological Society and also works on the Chesham Museum Project.

Our last speaker of the season, *Miss Muriel Easter*, is an amateur historian and former teacher at Chorleywood College for Blind Girls.

George Cobby



Snippets

The Group is keen to acquire an epidiastroscope for a modest outlay. If someone knows where a bargain can be struck, please tell any member of the committee.

Would it be a good idea on Members' Evening to run a bring-and-buy stall for members' surplus history or local interest books? The Chairman will ask for members' views during the season's first meeting.

Amersham Museum opening times till the end of October 1997 are 2.30 pm - 4.30 pm on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays. The Museum is at 49 High Street, Amersham.

Contributions (however brief) for the next issue of the newsletter would be welcomed. Please contact David Ridgwell if you have any thoughts.

Can you identify these animals and name the historical or literary figures associated with them:?

1. Bucephalus 2. Bullseye 3. Copenhagen 4. Hodge 5. Incitatus 6. Modestine 7. Rocinante
A small prize will be awarded on Members' Evening for the first set of correct answers (on a postcard to be handed in to the Chairman).

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF HISTORICAL FICTION

Some years ago one of our guest speakers told me that she avoided historical fiction because she was afraid that she would end by believing it. She had a point: Alexandre Dumas' dashing d'Artagnan is infinitely preferable to the cunning Cardinal. But how many readers/viewers of "The Three Musketeers" know that in reality Richelieu's aim was to discourage the duelling aristocracy from decimating itself?

Much of our rejection of historical fiction rests, in my opinion, on a dislike of a) corny dialogue ("Have at thee, Varlet", or, for the more sophisticated: "Men of the Middle Ages, we are going to commence the Hundred Years War") and b) on screen, phoney accents ("Yonder lies der cassel ov my farder"). A further disadvantage is that we are often acutely aware that such and such a historical character continues to look like Lana Turner, Elizabeth Taylor, Tony Curtis, Rex Harrison et al. On the other hand, for all its inaccuracies, a really well-made costume-piece can overcome the ever-recognisable features of, say, Errol Flynn and Basil Rathbone in the 1938 "Adventures of Robin Hood", undoubtedly the best and most entertaining screen version of that legend.

Do we have to be deflected from the truth? Sometimes it would seem so. Arguably the greatest piece of historical fiction of all time is Shakespeare's "Richard III", which has been exerting its influence for 400 years. It is tremendous melodrama, but it is NOT history, although there are historians who would have us believe it so. Take the wonderful opening lines:

Now is the winter of our discontent
 Made glorious summer by this sun of York.

These words are spoken immediately after the coronation of Edward IV, and no doubt you can picture Laurence Olivier declaiming them as the adult Richard Duke of Gloucester. In historical fact he should have been portraying a nine-year old boy. Even earlier, in the Henry VI trilogy, the Bard has Richard fighting in the First Battle of St Albans at the ripe old age of two and a half!

The point I want to make is that far from deceiving us, historical fiction can stimulate an interest in a given event, period or person, and we can find out much, if not always all of the truth for ourselves. It does not have to be Shakespeare, but an easy and pleasurable beginning can be made with the Bard and a Dictionary of Dates. For starters, let me remind you that in "Richard III" the events of fourteen years are compressed into a period of four months. Once started, it is not difficult to become a "historical detective", and I suggest that an interest along these lines would make a suitable subject for a talk at our annual Members' Evening.

We shall have an opportunity to assess historical accuracy when Mr Chris Gravett opens our season with a talk on his role as historical adviser to the BBC's TV serialisation of "Ivanhoe". One question I shall have: Why did Sir Walter Scott make so much of Saxons versus Normans, when at this period England was into the second generation of Plantagenet rule!

George Cobby

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| <p>CHOLESBURY-CUM-ST LEONARDS LOCAL HISTORY GROUP</p> <p>Chairman and Archivist: Mrs E. Money, The Old Manor House, Cholesbury (01494 758235)</p> <p>General Secretary: Mrs P Thomas, Cherry Orchards, Cholesbury Common (01494 758460)</p> <p>Treasurer: Mrs B Gomm, 71 Berkeley Avenue, Chesham (01494 785930)</p> <p>Programme Secretary: Mr G Cobby, Dundridge Cottage, Gilberts Hill, St Leonards (01494 758224)</p> <p>Committee: Mrs S Blomfield (01494 758314), Miss C Coates (01494 758102), Mrs S Jones (01494 837245), Mr D Ridgwell (01442 825746).</p> |
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