

# STOW and DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY

## AUTUMN 2015 NEWSLETTER NO 190

### **Forthcoming Events: -**

As ever, we try to include local subjects, places or speakers of interest and hope in our new 2015-16 season of talks, events and visits there will be something for everyone to enjoy. Full details of course can be found on the Society's website or Noticeboard at St. Edward's Hall.

### **Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> October - "Magna Carta: villainy, treachery and liberty."**

Our first talk of the new season on October 2nd will mark this year's 800th anniversary of Magna Carta. The speaker is our own committee member, Derek Taylor whose second book, "Magna Carta in 20 Places" was published in May by The History Press. Derek, who is a former ITN reporter turned historian, has just completed a lecture tour on the Queen Mary 2, and is currently in New York where he's making a televised appearance at America's biggest book festival. His talk to the Society, entitled "Magna Carta: villainy, treachery and liberty" promises to keep us on the edge of our seats. He'll explain who were the true heroes and who the real villains in the long and bloody struggle for freedom and justice inspired by Magna Carta - and how this most English of treasures was almost lost for ever.

### **Friday, 4<sup>th</sup> December –**

### **"Do you remember Adlestrop? Stories and histories from Gloucestershire's railways."**

There have been up to 150 railway stations in Gloucestershire over the years and this is the story of some of them from their conception, their glory days and how so many faded away. Stow-on-the-Wold of course is a prime example! Our speaker, Tony Conder, came to Gloucestershire to open the National Waterways museum in Gloucester docks and is now a civic trust guide in the city.

### **Autumn Lunch – Wednesday, 25<sup>th</sup> November**

After such an enjoyable venue last time we've decided to hold our lunch once again at the Mill House Hotel in Kingham. But this time we're delighted that Edward Gillespie, OBE will be our special "after lunch" speaker. Some of you will know him from the sporting world as the hugely successful and innovative Managing Director at Cheltenham racecourse for over 30 years – but how many of you know about his involvement in the Cheltenham Literature Festival, his love of music, theatre .... and his appearance on stage in the recent Gloucester Mystery Plays? His talk on "Cheltenham – Festival Town" will be extremely entertaining!

Please keep your eyes open for booking forms for our lunch which will be distributed shortly. Places will be limited.

### **The Stow Cotswold Festival**

Well, it's all over now for another couple of years – but what a big success the day was! Our town owes enormous thanks to Maggie Deacon, Chairman of the Festival Committee, and to all its members who worked so hard over the past 20 months or so to provide Stow with its special day.

But a HUGE thank-you now needs to be expressed again to everyone from the Civic Society who volunteered in so very many varied ways to make our own contribution to the day such a vital one. To all those who helped in sewing our special William Morris quilt for Appomattox (and for the work on it still on-

going!), to everyone who kindly sponsored a hexagon, who made our American lapel badges, masterminded the refreshments we provided in St. Edward's Hall, who baked all the delicious cakes, cookies and muffins etc. and also helped to serve them during the day, to all who helped decorate the Hall beforehand and then dismantled it, who kindly provided the American-themed decorations, to those who helped man our Society stall in the Hall during the day and to Derek Arthurs and Simon Clarke who volunteered and manned their own display stands during the day. Thank you again to everyone for your time and enthusiasm which has also helped to promote our Society to many more people.

We're delighted that sponsorship of all the hexagons on the quilt, together with money from lapel badges, has brought in over £800. This, together with over £250 from refreshments on the day means that the Society has raised over £1,000 for the Festival's local charities – a great achievement. Thank you!

And finally, an update on the quilt itself ..... work is continuing now on finishing putting the quilt together. We will then display the quilt in the Museum Cabinets for a short period before sending it over to our friends in Appomattox, Virginia - to arrive in good time for Thanksgiving in November.

### **Nearly Christmas?**

Our group of ladies had such fun making the quilt – we are now wondering whether any more ladies would like to join them in sewing decorations for our Civic Society Christmas Tree? If you are interested in getting together for a bit of sewing over a cup of tea or coffee then please contact Rachel Surman on 01451 833783. The group wants to start its preparations asap so please come forward now if you are interested.

### **William Smith**

Our visit to the William Smith exhibition in late July has been covered by an article on our website, but for those without internet access the following is an excerpt of Derek Taylor's article: -

“To celebrate Smith's life, members assembled in the Square - near the plaque unveiled by the Society on Smith's old residence five years ago - before making the trip to Churchill in Oxfordshire where he was born. Churchill's Heritage Centre has a graphic display illustrating the great geologist's life and achievements.

“Smith came from humble origins, the son of a blacksmith. He trained as a surveyor, and is said to have covered 10,000 miles a year on foot, horse and carriage. He recognised the recurrence of layers of sediment and rock and the unique fossils associated with them, and after 15 years of this research he published his map.

“But it took many more years before his contribution to science was recognised. Others copied his map without giving him credit for it. And even the Geological Society didn't award him their Gold Medal until 16 years after the map's publication. By this time, Smith himself had been bankrupted and had spent three years in a debtors' prison.

“Today the Geological Society holds an annual William Smith lecture to celebrate his work. And in case you're in doubt about how influential this Stow resident was, it's arguable that the Industrial Revolution – fired up on coal and iron – could not have happened without Smith's map to show where those vital minerals could be mined”.

The Heritage Centre in Churchill is open Saturday and Sunday  
22 March - 30 September 2.00 until 4.30pm (free admission) [www.churchillheritage.org.uk](http://www.churchillheritage.org.uk)

### **More Sir Alfred East paintings in Upper Swell!**

I hope that by now most of our members will be aware of the work of this once well-known artist. He was a prolific painter having worked in a wide range of locations at home and around the world, and his output in the Cotswolds is no less impressive – just how much so we are learning all the time. We have produced

some draft copies of a booklet about his life and work in the Cotswolds and now the owners of the Mill House have discovered another view of Upper Swell Mill : -



*"An English Farmstead" by Sir Alfred East*



*Photograph of the Mill House*

Then Paul Johnson, his step grandson, sent me a copy of a painting of a village scene bearing some resemblance to Upper Swell. The only doubt concerned the portrayal of a cottage in the foreground. Although Alfred East was quite prepared to relocate the occasional tree which did not quite fit in with the view, (and on one print he even relocated the tower of St Edward's Church), in general his architectural representations were accurate and on this occasion the cottage did not look right compared to the present day view. I showed a copy of it to the owners of the house and they confirmed that it was indeed their house. One end of their property had either fallen down or been demolished and the end re-constructed in the century or so since the date of the painting.

This was exciting news – another AE picture of Upper Swell, though the painting is privately owned and not on display. However the owners were looking through the internet at other East paintings when their eye fell upon a work which had been up for auction in America and appeared to be a view up the hill in Upper Swell, showing the road and a haycart – and once again the cottage as it was in the late 19<sup>th</sup> C. (Much of AE's work had remained in the US since being on display at an exhibition there in 1909/10.)



It had recently been sold in the auction, but on the off-chance the owners of the cottage contacted the auctioneer to enquire who had purchased it. A few days later they received a telephone call from the buyer, who lived in England! As soon as he realised the relevance of the subject matter to the village he immediately said that they should have it, and offered it to them on the basis that he was re-imbursed for the auction price and subsequent expenses. This most generous offer means that the painting is now back home in Upper Swell!

This is a most heart warming story showing that not all art buyers are out to make a profit, some of them have true feelings for their acquisitions and I'm sure the former owner is happy knowing that this painting is now in its rightful place.

### **Portraits at Madresfield**

One of the many memorable features of our Madresfield visit was their vast collection of portraits. They covered a wide range of history and were combined with family portraits, old and new. They followed no particular theme but were just hung in seemingly random order. Despite this my eye alighted on a number of portraits of characters associated with the Civil War and its aftermath which would admirably supplement our own Crawford Christie selection! In particular there was a very imposing portrait of Charles II by van Honthorst, and an equally impressive full length one of his wife, Catherine of Braganza. Moreover there were portraits of two of Charles' most significant illegitimate sons which we would love to

have copies of. One was Charles, the first Duke of Richmond and ancestor of the current Duke who was granted the estate of Goodwood in Sussex. His mother was Louise de Kerouaille, the Duchess of Portsmouth and a portrait of her was also spotted. She is an alternative candidate for the identity of our nude lady, currently listed as Nell Gwynne, but it was hard to assess whether she bore any resemblance to our portrait as she was fully clothed!

The other son portrayed was James Scott, the Duke of Monmouth who was born to Lucy Walter in 1649 whilst Charles was in exile in Holland during the Protectorate. He is now famous for the Monmouth Rebellion, his attempt to wrest the crown of England from his uncle James II at the Battle of Sedgemoor on the Somerset Levels in 1685. This was the last pitched battle on English soil and his army was crushed by the Royalist forces of King James. Many of his supporters were tried at the Bloody Assizes under Judge Jeffries whilst Monmouth himself was tried and executed in London. The final attempt by the Jacobites to regain the Crown was crushed at Culloden in 1745. This finally ended the fighting over the Crown which had on many occasions brought the country to the brink of Civil War.

Sadly for us these pictures are not in the public domain and no photography was permitted inside the house, so a future visit is called for!

### **Norman Goodman**

Those who attended the unveiling ceremony of the plaque at the cross will recall the famous handshake between David Glaisyer and Norman Goodman, descendants of the two opposing armies in the Civil War and what delightful and appreciative guests Norman and his wife were.

Sadly news was received a while ago that Norman had died and our thoughts go out to his widow. We can only say that we were very privileged to have enjoyed his company on that auspicious occasion and he will be long remembered in Stow. If possible we would like to have the BBC video of that occasion on our website in his memory.



### **The Battlefield Survey**

The date for the survey draws closer. It will be a very low key affair by just 5 experienced battlefield detectorists. This will no doubt disappoint some of those who signed up to help with the originally planned survey some time ago, but the funding is very low and does not place any conditions, or reserves, for involving the local community. Generous offers of help from local metal detectorist societies have been made, but there is little spare funding and time for training to enable them to be part of the team and they want the minimum of publicity to ensure their task is not hampered by unofficial detectorists, or “nighthawkers” as they are known. Also much of the area is part of the Abbotswood Estate and the agents have requested the minimum number of people in case any prospective buyers wish to visit the area during the survey. (We must presume that not everyone would be pleased to find that their prospective land is the site of a historic battle.) Results of the survey will be studied to see whether there is justification for further work, but the Battlefields Trust and the land owners would wish the actual locations requiring further investigation not to become public knowledge at this stage.

### **The Cricket Museum**

It is with great regret that we have to report the final closure of the cricket museum. For a short period there was hope of a revival, but that failed and it is now closed in Stow for good. It was a most impressive collection of cricketing memorabilia of interest to everyone, whether a cricket fan or not – but more than that Andy and Marion organised cricket talks by well known authors and commentators and many of us

enjoyed the most splendid jazz evenings (and buffets!) in such an intimate setting. They couldn't have tried harder to make it a success and the museum was visited by many well known personalities and players. Despite that, Andy reported that not a single member of Stow Cricket Club had been to visit. Yet W. G. Grace was known to have played on at least one occasion on Stow Cricket field. Stow on the Wold was evidently not the best location for such an attraction, but it is to be hoped that Andy might find a more suitable and appreciative location for the collection elsewhere.

### **How High is Stow?**

A long wait in a slow traffic queue on the hill from Moreton set me musing about a discussion point raised by a member on email recently on the highest point in Stow and was it "The Highest Town in the Cotswolds"? (Non trivia enthusiasts can stop reading at this point!) Having always considered the highest point to be North of the Town, a study of the OS map reveals that in fact the highest point in Stow is at the junction between the Fosseway and the Broadwell junction just North of Tesco, at 234 metres, or 767 feet, so our popular claim to be 800 feet above sea level (ASL) is a slight exaggeration, though close enough. As he states, the Church Tower adds another 88 feet, though its base is lower than the highest point, and it certainly stands proudly on the hill as a landmark. But are we the highest Town? Chipping Norton is stated to be "The Highest Town in Oxfordshire" It sits on the side of a hill and is recorded by the OS as being 212m/696ft, though the highest point on the hill is stated to be 223m, slightly different to those in the email, but still rather less than Stow. Snowhill is the highest village in the locality with some houses up at 253 metres, just beating the highest ground locally, Wyck Hill beacon at 250m/820ft. Broadway Tower is claimed to be 312 metres above sea level, though whether this is the top of the tower or the base is not stated. The highest point in the Cotswolds is Cleeve Hill, claimed on the website to be at 330m/1,083ft, rather less than the Malverns at 425m/1,394ft.

Many thanks to our emailer for raising this item of interest to all fellow nerds, you are not alone!

### **Newsletter**

Having produced the newsletter for the past 6 years I am beginning to run out of ideas and steam. It is time for a new editor and new ideas. I have enjoyed writing the articles and am prepared to continue to contribute occasionally in future but I find it increasingly dominating my thoughts as the deadline for each new edition looms. I have to give much thanks to Rachel for her input, which is the most important reason for the newsletter – to let everyone know what events are coming up. My contribution mainly comprises reports on the talks and outings and any other items of interest as well as the layout, printing and distribution. The history of the Town had already been comprehensively covered during the years that the late Veronica Clapham was editor. The results of her years of extensive research have been collected into "Glimpses of the Past", an invaluable source of reference for every resident, and I feel I have contributed little to the wealth of information in this book, not being a historian by profession. Even so I have never experienced a shortage of topics of interest to write about. Whether they are of interest to the readers is a different matter! However it's time to move on so please would someone like to take over the baton?

### **Town Tours**

Despite our efforts in the last two years to build up a group of guides to widen the market for these tours, and having spent additional time this year in providing individual training sessions, the enthusiasm shown at the start of the season has evaporated and we only have one other willing guide, and even then I have been present for all of the walk dates this year

We really need people who are prepared to put the scheduled dates in their diaries and commit to them, otherwise whenever something else crops up for them it falls back on to me again. Much as I enjoy conducting these groups around, unless I can obtain some relief from this frequent schedule of Sundays then I will have to stand down and there will be no Town Tours programme next year.