

# STOW and DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY

## SPRING 2015 NEWSLETTER NO 188

### Forthcoming Events: -

#### Next Meeting

Just a reminder that our next Open Meeting is at the end of March (avoiding Good Friday which this year falls on the first Friday in April).

#### Friday, 27<sup>th</sup> March 2015 at 7.30 pm – *“The original Brideshead – a history of Madresfield”*

Madresfield Court is a beautiful moated house hidden away on a 5,000 acre estate at the foot of the Malvern Hills and has been the ancestral home of the Lygon family since the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The family and house famously proved a source of inspiration for Evelyn Waugh’s story of *“Brideshead Revisited”* and our speaker Brian Jauncey, a current guide at Madresfield, will tell the history of its colourful characters and wonderfully sumptuous interiors.

Note, *The meeting will be preceded by a Special General Meeting of the Society to agree the revised constitution – see “Constitution” on P2.*



Madresfield Court

#### Friday, 5<sup>th</sup> June 2015 – short A.G.M. to begin at 7.00 pm. (Refreshments served from 6.30 p.m.) Please do come along! Followed at 7.30 pm by *“Barley, Beer and Barrels”*

Martin Way will be giving us a potted look at the ‘Mystery of Brewing’ with reference to local Breweries and covering the brewing of beer from the Hops through to the Cooper’s craft and the unique tools of his trade. (No doubt one or two of our members will adjourn to a local pub afterwards to test this out and all are welcome to join in!)

#### Tuesday, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2015

Our talk by Brian Jauncey on 27<sup>th</sup> March will perfectly complement our visit on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> May to Madresfield Court, followed by lunch and a tour of Worcester Cathedral (right). A few places are still available (see details enclosed); please contact Rachel on 01451 833783 if you would like to join us.



Our summer visit in July is to the beautiful city of Bath so please keep an eye open for details which will be announced soon.

## **Constitution**

In order to comply with the rules for the collection of Gift Aid, we are obliged to submit a copy of our constitution to HMRC. Having looked at the current constitution it became apparent that some of the references are now out of date so the Executive Committee has met and produced a slightly updated version. This takes into account the way in which the Society operates today and is in line with the constitutions of other Civic Societies in Gloucestershire. The revised document has been sent to members. In order to ratify this document we need members to vote at a special meeting. We are therefore proposing to make the next Open Meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2015 a 'Special Meeting' for this purpose. This will only take up 5 minutes of the evening and we'll have the planned talk on Madresfield afterwards.

## **Battlefield Walk and Portraits – Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> March at 1.30 pm**

The annual battlefield walk will take place on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> March starting from the car park adjacent to Tesco at 1.30 pm and will be led by Simon Marsh of the Battlefields Trust. The cost is £5.00 for non members of the Battlefields Trust. Dare we hope that this year may be the last walk without controversy? (see "*Battlefield Survey*" on P3)

This year we are also offering participants on the walk the opportunity to view the Civil War portraits in St Edward's Hall in the morning, with guides on hand to talk about the characters portrayed and their parts in the conflict. We will also be displaying some of our collection of armaments for visitors to inspect and handle. This will take place in the morning before the walk between 11.30 and 12.30. Even if you are not coming on the walk, do come along and join us. There will be a charge of £5 towards the maintenance and restoration of the collection. Early indications through the Battlefields Trust website have already attracted interest.

Although most of our members will have seen these paintings on the walls of the upper Hall, both during our Open Meetings and on other occasions when the Hall is open, but knowing who the characters are and their stories does add to the pleasure of seeing them whenever you enter the upstairs Hall, so do take the opportunity to come along to this event, or any of the Hall Open Days that are held throughout the year on the first Thursday of each month from May to October.

## **Wells Working Group**

The Wells Working Group are planning to undertake an overall cleaning of the Wells and tidying and trimming of the surrounding area on Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015, subject to council agreement. A number of members have signed up to help in this exercise, but if you wish to join us then please contact Dave Wiblin on 01451 831069 or email on [d.wiblin@btinternet.com](mailto:d.wiblin@btinternet.com).

## **How old is your House?**

Paul Clark of the Oxfordshire Buildings Record really enjoyed his time in Stow both researching our houses and then on 6<sup>th</sup> February explaining to our members just "*How old is your House?*" He is very happy to come back to Stow and visit anyone who would like him to take a look at their house (pre 1900's please). If you want to take part then please contact Rachel on 01451 833783.

## **Thank you!**

Once again, this is a big thank you to all members who have already come forward and offered help with serving refreshments or setting up the Hall for our evening meetings. It really is greatly appreciated!

## **Calling all members! Stow Cotswold Festival – Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> July 2015**

As you know, our Society has been invited to host an event in St. Edward's Hall again on the day of the Festival and we're planning to make it an American-themed celebration! We're delighted that, with the

involvement of a local professional who is keen to help us, we'll be staging a 'sewing bee' in the Hall; the aim is to create a unique and special quilt on the day of the Festival from Stow Civic Society which we can then present to our American friends in Appomattox. We'll be encouraging anyone to drop into the Hall and either take part by stitching a hexagon onto the quilt in person or sponsoring one of the many hexagons making up the quilt. Please don't worry about the quality (or not!) of your needlework. There will be plenty of people on hand to help and so it's going to be a lot of fun! We'll also have some barbershop singers performing in the Hall and we're aiming to serve American style refreshments during the day (cookies, muffins, cakes etc).

Rachel and Nigel are now looking for volunteers to help with preparations – either in advance or to help for a little while on the day itself. We do hope that with enough volunteers this will then ensure everyone will have plenty of time to enjoy the other events happening around the town too. If anyone could offer help with preparations for the quilt, helping on the day with assembling the quilt, home-baking and/or helping on the day with serving refreshments or stewarding in the Hall, then Rachel would be really pleased if you would contact her as soon as you can on **01451 833783** or [rachelsurman@btopenworld.com](mailto:rachelsurman@btopenworld.com) There really **IS** a role for everyone and it would be great if you would help and get involved!

### **Battlefield Survey**

The news that the Battlefield Survey is to go ahead this year is an exciting prospect. Our application for a Heritage Lottery fund grant was turned down in 2011, but a grant has been received from the Arms and Armour Heritage Trust, which also generously helped fund the museum cabinet in St Edward's Hall, and together with some of the English Heritage grant money to the Battlefields Trust, there is enough for a small survey. This will be on a much reduced scale to that initially envisaged, and will be carried out in early October this year. Simon Marsh will lead a small team of experienced battlefield detectorists and will cover a wide area looking for indications of where the action took place. Depending on what is found there may be a need for a more thorough localised survey subsequently. Arrangements are continuing and we will hold our breath in anticipation!

*(N.B. I will be contacting those who previously volunteered to help in the survey as arrangements progress.)*

### **The Archives**

We have just completed our check of the Archives housed in the Library and are now planning our Spring activities. This will involve researching Well Lane and Union Street, using a variety of methods. Any offers of help and any amount of time, regular or occasional, would be most welcome and very much appreciated. Also, any information would be well received.

Please ring Trish Ashley, 01451 - 832 - 314.

### **William Smith Exhibition**

In recognition that our Society has placed a plaque on the Manor House in Stow in his memory, the Churchill and Sarsden Heritage Centre has sent us the following notice about an exhibition to be held on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays between 2 pm and 4.30 pm from 22<sup>nd</sup> March to 21<sup>st</sup> September 2015: -



“William Smith (1769 –1839) was born in Churchill and in 1815 published the first geological map of England and Wales and which he accomplished on his own, with the support of his nephew who travelled with him for many years. It led to him finally becoming recognised as the Father of English Geology. The display comprises interactive touch screens together with archive material, village and family records, photographs and maps. The Heritage Centre is in the chancel of the medieval church and is all that remains of the building. It is in a delightful setting, overlooking the Swail Brook valley and the 'lost village' destroyed by fire in 1684.”

## Lord Nuffield - continued

In the last newsletter we left the young William Morris with his own bicycle repair business at 16, unable to get credit and having to cycle as far as Coventry to obtain spare parts. In the process he became an accomplished cyclist and started racing on his own bikes which further enhanced his reputation. He joined a cycling club in Headington, where he met his future wife, Elizabeth Anstey. In 1901 he acquired another premises, formed a partnership and started making motorbikes – more like motorised cycles at first with JAP engines, (J. A. Prestwich in N. London – for the non-petrol heads). The partnership was dissolved after they fell out, and he resolved never to enter in such an arrangement again.

He later acquired new premises in Longwall Street in Oxford where he started getting interested in cars. As well as repairing them he also had a fleet of cars which were hired out (our speaker's father learnt to drive in one of these cars!). Sadly the business went bankrupt, but the determined young man stood in the rain at the auction and bought his tools and equipment back.

Later he met Lord Macclesfield who was so impressed by his motivation to succeed that he presented him with a cheque for a loan of £4000, which he took along to Barclays Bank where the manager promptly lent him another £4000. At this point William had just one shilling of his own money.

William had been to the US where he had seen Henry Ford's pioneering method of assembly lines, a system which didn't require the range of engineering skills that were available in Birmingham. He designed a car and took the plans along to the Motor Show where he obtained orders for 25 cars. Having no premises, he acquired his old premises, pulled it down and built his first Morris Garage, where he produced his first car, the Morris 11.7 HP. He later acquired the old Grammar School with a large metal shed behind it, but he later learnt a valuable lesson. One of his customers collected his car and drove it away, but shortly afterwards the back axle broke. He went out and replaced it but it later broke again, and at this point he realised that the supplier had made it out of cast iron instead of phosphor bronze. He decided that he would purchase his suppliers to ensure proper quality control. He later bought up SU carburettors and his engine supplier, Hotchkiss of Coventry. His famous "Bullnose" car was Britain's equivalent of America's Model T Ford and helped introduce motoring for the masses. He also introduced motorised buses to Oxford despite the Council's opposition. The public much preferred them to the horse drawn ones, so they were forced to adopt them.



Production rose from 3,000 cars in 1913 to 55,000 in 1926, one third of total UK car production, despite financial problems in 1920, and by 1937 the workforce had risen to 10,000. Car bodies were made of wood with steel panels, but impressed by the US cars with their all steel bodies he entered into a joint venture, despite his earlier resolution. This was a body manufacturer called the Pressed Steel Company, opposite his factory and connected by a bridge. The first press was installed with the help of the Barrow Shipyard workers and by 1930 spot-welded monocoque bodyshells were being produced. Sadly, true to form he fell out with his partner and in the High Court Morris and his colleague were both ordered to surrender their memberships of the Board of the company and they lost all the money they had invested.



The concept of styling was then introduced and the flat radiator appeared on the 1928 Cowley. The first Morris Minor (*left*) was introduced with sliding windows and then the first MG, the Midget. In 1938 he purchased the bankrupt Riley Company and later, Wolseley Motors. The Morris 8 was the first to have hydraulic brakes, and then the Morris £100 Tourer was produced to compete with the Austin 7.

In addition to the many honours he had been awarded since 1918, he was raised to the peerage as Baron Nuffield in 1934 and in 1938 he became Viscount Nuffield. Leading up to the War years the Cowley factory production was turned over to munitions, and Morris was appointed to run a new factory at Castle Bromwich to build Spitfires. The change to aircraft production was a large step and the factory failed to reach his expectations so Lord Beaverbrook, who was in charge of aircraft production, dismissed Morris and handed the plant over to Vickers Supermarine.

Eventually Morris Motors merged with his great rival, the Austin Motor Company in Birmingham as part of the British Motor Corporation and he was Chairman of that organisation for the first year.

After the War he turned his attention to other matters. A doctor and philanthropist, Sir William Osler, used to get the young Morris to repair his cars, but later he became a hypochondriac and Morris resolved to set up a TB hospital. He manufactured iron lungs and offered them to any organisation which had need of one to counter the polio epidemic of the 1940's and '50's. Over 1700 were distributed.

He created the Nuffield foundation and donated £10M to found hospitals, and Nuffield College in Oxford. On his 59<sup>th</sup> birthday the University set up 3 chairs of medicine, and the college is now considered to be No 1 in the world. In his lifetime he donated £30M, equivalent to over £700M in today's money, towards medical research and hospitals.

Despite his wealth he lived a frugal lifestyle, preferring not to mix with high society in London. He purchased Nuffield Place near Wallingford, a comfortable, though not palatial, Lutyens style house, and drove the same Wolseley car for many years. The house is opposite the Huntercombe Golf Club and legend has it that he was refused membership, being a "tradesman", so he bought the club!



He died in 1963, aged 85 and having no heirs he stipulated in his will that his house remained intact and it was opened to the public sporadically. It recently passed to the National Trust and remains as a time-warped of the 1930's. It is a fitting reminder of this modest, unassuming man who was one of Britain's greatest benefactors.

### **How Old is Your House?**

Our speaker, Paul Clark, raised a few eyebrows with the opening statement of his fascinating talk. Looking at the buildings in Stow Square, he said he saw mostly 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century buildings. This was not a particular surprise as we knew that the frontages of the buildings had been replaced, and he confirmed that many features of the interiors were older, but he went on to say that he had found little evidence of anything much older than 300 years. Considering the Market Charter was granted in 1107 A.D., it had always been thought that the construction of the Square as a market place would have commenced within 100 years of that date.

However he suggested that looking at the map of the layout of the burgage plots, it was likely that the Square had been laid out in the Middle Ages. Stow has 116 listed buildings, 46 of them in the Square, but the listings had been rather hastily carried out, mainly from the outside, and historical information was limited.

Of all the ways to date a building, the use of materials often gave clues. The oldest material, timber, lent itself to the use of dendrochronology, which could often give the date to a particular month in the year when it was felled! Unfortunately there are no timber framed buildings in Stow, probably due to the local availability of stone. Other clues for timber can be gained from saw marks, from medieval and post-medieval hand sawing up to the use of circular saws from the 1820's. Also carpenter's marks showing the manner of assembly of the previously laid out components, which changed over the years.

The oldest roof trusses seen were in Woolcomber House in Sheep Street, now the showroom for Clearview Stoves. But Stow presented problems in that stone is very difficult to date.

However other clues lay in the position and style of the chimney(s), the shape of the house – asymmetrical before the Renaissance, symmetrical after, and even the degree of smoke blackening of the roof timbers. Paul explained the development of the Hall House, with high and low status ends and the fire in the centre, and the eventual use of the chimney post-1550, originally inserted centrally in the cross passage, sometimes even in the front wall to exhibit the status of the occupant, but later built into the end walls. Fireplaces changed in fashion, from “hooded” designs in the 13<sup>th</sup> C. to the Tudor arched design, decorated spandrels and mouldings in the 16<sup>th</sup> C., to mantelpieces in the 17<sup>th</sup> C. He mentioned the 15<sup>th</sup> C. fireplaces in the Porch House as good examples of their era.

Ceilings were another clue. By the 17<sup>th</sup> C. timber became scarce, but prior to that ceilings were characterised by their generous use of wood, Woolcomber House again being a good example of a 15<sup>th</sup> C. ceiling with its ornately carved roof beams as befitted a high status house.

Windows gave a further clue, not just the placement, which may have been changed, but in the shape of the mullions, citing good examples of “cavetto” moulding on the Church and the Masonic Hall, formerly the grammar school, in Church Street. The shape of the window head and the use of transoms, the baroque style with mouldings around the windows and keystones all gave clues to the period.

Later, sash windows were introduced, moving from small panes to larger ones once the glass tax was removed in 1845. This tax was based on the weight of glass and very thin glass was used prior to the removal of the tax. The counterbalance weight boxes were originally set forward, but later moved back behind the bricks due to regulations introduced following the Great Fire of London. The use of larger areas of glass led to the frame of the upper opening section being designed with “horns” to stiffen the frame, and these are a good guide to the date of the windows.

Many more examples of the architectural clues to the date of a house were shown, but Paul finished with a note of caution. Once a style has been invented, it cannot be uninvented, so the use of a particular architectural style or feature can never be a sure guide to the period in which it was built, and many such features can be added later. Many examples of this were illustrated, again demonstrating that changes to a stone building could be very effectively disguised.

Paul proved a most knowledgeable and absorbing speaker, and he finished by thanking all those members who had invited him into their houses and allowed him to use their interior details as local examples for his talk.

### **Witch’s Marks**

The comments from our speaker Paul Clark in February introduced some speculation about the true age of many of Stow’s buildings. The Porch House is reputed to be the oldest building in Town, dating back, it is said, to around 1000 AD, but if that is the case then the oldest features have been long covered up or destroyed by subsequent improvements. Whilst the English Heritage listing system and vigilance exerts some control nowadays, previous restorers were not so constrained and many historical buildings have had their deeper secrets destroyed. However the Jacobean fireplaces in what is now the main restaurant, having been uncovered during restorations in 1996, are still there today and one of them displays some intricate markings which are known as “Witch’s Marks”.

In her book about the history of the Porch House\*, which was quoted in an earlier article, Ruth Stratton explains that people believed witches slipped down the chimney to take over an unsuspecting household, so marks were placed at the points of entry to houses where they could be clearly seen. Doors were also marked as it was traditional for families to gather round the fire with their backs to the door, allowing any old witch to creep in unsuspected and the house would be “hag-ridden” in no time. Witches were said to despise iron and iron horseshoes were placed above doors, and iron crosses on barns, or scratched on the door latches, as “cattle-bewitching” was a big problem in the 16<sup>th</sup> C.

Each mark meant something specific, either the phases of the moon or some particular reference to the household.



Witch's Mark in the Porch House

Witches also didn't like salt or water, and salt boxes were kept in inglenooks so salt could be thrown onto the flames to deter witches from coming down the chimney. From this came the tradition of throwing salt over your left shoulder for good luck, left being the side associated with the Devil. If you lived in a moated house then you were safe as witches didn't like travelling across water, but if you didn't a bowl of water was kept beside the fire for similar reasons.

Belief in witches still exists in other countries, and although the legend still crops up in films and popular computer games, it has largely disappeared in the West. But a few related superstitions, such as "lucky" horseshoes and throwing salt over the shoulder, are still retained, and even now many people will not venture outside their houses on a Friday 13<sup>th</sup>. It is estimated that some 21 million Americans share this fear, and US companies can lose up to \$900 million of business on these days.

According to the internet, the term for this superstition, "triskaidekaphobia", has been created from the Greek "tris" and "deka", meaning 3 and 10 respectively, and this word forms the basis of a lexical variant "friggatriskaidekaphobia" also meaning fear of Friday 13th. The prefix "frigga" is based on the name of an ancient Scandinavian goddess who was associated with witchcraft and Fridays (the witch's Sabbath). So belief in witches could still be more common than we think!

*\*With acknowledgements to "A Secret History of the Royalist Hotel" by Ruth Stratton.*