

# STOW and DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY

## SUMMER 2015 NEWSLETTER NO 189

### Forthcoming Events: -

*A busy summer for the Society – and a busy autumn ahead!*

### **Stow Cotswold Festival – Saturday, 4<sup>th</sup> July**

We are progressing very well with the advance preparation of our special unique quilt being made as a gift for our friends in Appomattox. Enormous thanks go to our small but extremely enthusiastic band of ladies (you all know who you are!) under the guidance of our 'super quilter' Stephanie Venn who are tirelessly cutting and stitching over 130 hexagons in beautiful William Morris fabrics ready for our 'Sewing Bee' in St. Edward's Hall when we aim to put the quilt together on the day.

Thanks to everyone who has already selected their hexagon(s) when the fabrics were revealed at our AGM last Friday evening. But we would like as many Society members as possible to be included and have their name associated with the quilt. Please, please come along to see us in the Hall on the day and choose your own hexagon or contact Rachel now if you will be away at that time or would like to donate in advance. Donations and pledges of £5 per hexagon are already coming in and we would hate you to miss out!

A big thank-you also to everyone who has already volunteered to help with the home-made refreshments we are offering at our 'American tea party' in the Hall during the day. Connie Keith would be delighted to hear from anyone who would be happy to do some baking or help in the Hall for a short time on the day – making and serving teas, coffees etc, manning the till or washing up. All offers of help would be gratefully received.

We will be setting up the Hall on Friday, 3<sup>rd</sup> July and, again, any help with this would be hugely appreciated. Please contact Rachel if you can spare even an hour on Friday or the day of the Festival itself. We always try to have some fun!

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Connie Keith – [connie.keith@icloud.com](mailto:connie.keith@icloud.com) – 01451 870-444

### **Summer and Autumn Visits**

### **Visit to William Smith Exhibition – Friday 24<sup>th</sup> July**

We're arranging a short local visit to the William Smith, Father of English Geology, Exhibition at Churchill to mark the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the first geological map of England and Wales. This Exhibition, run by the Churchill & Sarsden Heritage Centre together with The Oxford University Museum of Natural History, is in the chancel of the village's medieval church. As you may know, William 'Strata' Smith was born in Churchill but moved to Manor House, Stow

Square, where he spent 4 years with Edward Webb, training to be a surveyor – a defining time in his career – and to mark this our Society unveiled a commemorative plaque in summer 2009.

We're suggesting Society members meet by the plaque in Stow Square (9.30-10.00 am) for a quick photo together and then make our own way over to Churchill where we will have a short introductory talk by one of the guides followed by ample time to have a look around the exhibition and then enjoy an early lunch at The Chequers pub in Churchill. Anyone wanting to stay on and do a quick walk in the afternoon would then have their own transport.

If you would like to join us please contact Rachel asap ([rachelsurman@btopenworld.com](mailto:rachelsurman@btopenworld.com) – 01451 833783). There is no cost for the Exhibition but a donation on the day would be very welcome. (Own transport and lunch costs only – lift-share can be arranged.)

### **Trip to Bath – Thursday, 17<sup>th</sup> September 2015**

Please find full details on page 9 and the enclosed booking form. Our visit includes fully-guided tours of No 1 Royal Crescent and the Roman Baths. Cost is £35 per person.

### **Wychwood Brewery**

Our recent talk by Martin Way about the 'mystery of brewing' was fascinating with a follow-up tour of the brewery near Witney already requested by many! Look out soon for booking details for an October guided visit.

### **Open Meetings**

The dates for our 2015/2016 season are:-

Friday, 2nd October 2015

Friday, 4<sup>th</sup> December 2015

Friday, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2016

Friday, 1st April 2016

Friday, 3rd June 2016

### **Friday, 2<sup>nd</sup> October – “Magna Carta: villainy, treachery and liberty”**

We're particularly pleased that local historian, journalist and Civic Society committee member, Derek Taylor, fresh from the publication of his book “Magna Carta in 20 Places” will help us mark the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great Charter.

### **Help for Open Meetings**

As ever, any offers of help with refreshments and/or setting up the Hall for our October meeting – and indeed all our meetings for the season – would be very gratefully received. Please contact Rachel on 01451 833783 or email her at [rachelsurman@btopenworld.com](mailto:rachelsurman@btopenworld.com) Thank you!

## AGM

The AGM preceded the open meeting. The Chairman, Nigel Surman, reported on an enjoyable and successful year with many new and exciting goals and the Society continues on a solid footing as a respected organisation within the Town. His report mentioned many of the current and future achievements and with the support of the members he hoped that we could increase our membership to continue to fill the wonderful venue of St Edward's Hall.

The Events Secretary, Rachel Surman, thanked members for their response to the survey, which raised some interesting ideas for future events including special one-off events. For instance Earl Spencer had been invited to talk, and though he had declined, the offer is still open! She then reminded us of all the fascinating talks and visits we had enjoyed over the year and the successful Autumn Lunch at Kingham. Our next visits are to Bath and the William Smith exhibition in Churchill.

The Treasurer, Sylvia Wiblin, who had admirably stepped up to the post following the last AGM report, reported that our funds had increased over the last year and was in a healthy state. She thanked Michael Moseley for kindly auditing the accounts.

The election of the officers and committee members was straightforward as the members had all agreed to stand again. They were elected en bloc with the welcome addition of two new members, Connie Keith and Cynthia Duval whose skills and knowledge will add considerably to the executive committee's work.

## Theatre Trips

The first of these trips, organised by Sylvia Wiblin, was to see "12 Angry Men" at the Everyman in Cheltenham. 24 members attended the play and on their return, 14 of them enjoyed a meal at the White Hart. Building on the success of this venture, a second trip has been arranged to see "Absent Friends" on the 16<sup>th</sup> July, again at the Everyman. It is anticipated that a number of these trips will be organised for future productions. The possibility of attending other theatres, such as Malvern, and our little local theatre in Chipping Norton, will also be investigated. This is a welcome new venture for the Society, extending further the wide range of our activities.

## Madresfield talk

Madresfield is very unusual in several respects, according to our speaker, Brian Jauncey, a guide at Madresfield. Despite dating back to the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, it has remained in the possession of the same family throughout. It has never been sold, has no dungeon or ghosts and Elizabeth I never slept there! Knights in armour would have departed for the crusades from there. It was built when England was doing well, and the wealth of the gentry would be judged by the grandeur of their houses. It is constructed around a large courtyard and surrounded by a large moat, with stewponds for fish and a large pigeon loft. There are 2 acres of gardens and approximately 4,000 acres of land, though the estate originally extended to 4,700 acres.



During the war plans were made for the Royal Princesses to retreat to Madresfield in the event of an invasion - indeed the entire government was to move to Worcestershire - and truckloads of food were stored in the basement and subsequently forgotten for years. When the food was finally collected much of it had been eaten!

The fortunes of the family fluctuated over the years, but William Jennings was a very rich owner in the 17<sup>th</sup> C and when he died at 97 his will specified that his money would go to his mother! Many people turned up to claim inheritance rights and eventually his estate was split into 3 with one third, still a considerable sum, going to Madresfield. Later, Lady Kathleen Devon played a large part in the history of the house. She had 10 children including 4 boys who served with the Duke of Wellington. After the French had been defeated, their economy was in a disastrous state and the money enabled her to travel to Paris and buy up many of the contents of French chateaux whose owners were impoverished, and bring them back to England. This was no easy task so they were transported by ship up the River Severn to Bristol, and a road was built to transport the items for the last mile to the house. Much of the furniture came from Versailles and is now very valuable.

The long gallery was added later to permit the family to exercise during cold weather and contains a Dutch cradle of 1620. It could be covered with a net to keep cats out – the original cat's cradle?

The 5<sup>th</sup> Earl, Henry Lygon began the main overhaul of the house in Victorian times. He died before they could be completed but his brother Frederick, the 6<sup>th</sup> Earl completed the work. The 7<sup>th</sup> Earl, William Lygon, was ejected from Oxford University for a misdemeanour, but became Mayor of Worcester at 27 and later became Governor of New South Wales. He was a great pacifist in WWI sympathising with the "conscies". He said that the view of the Madresfield land was the "best in the world". Sadly his homosexuality became common knowledge and he was forced to leave England for Germany. His story could have destroyed the Monarchy. The Germans found phials of poison in his luggage and he was never left alone thereafter. He tried to return to England after his wife died, but he was warned that if he did, he would be arrested.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Earl, also William, first met "Sebastian" at Oxford and Evelyn Waugh visited the house where he was inspired to write "Brideshead Revisited". Sadly, though, because of the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl's "misdemeanours" the family were ostracised so they retreated to Madresfield and hid from society. Despite this, the composer Edward Elgar visited the house – his father was a piano tuner. Concerts were held there and many of Elgar's manuscripts are in the Library.

Since that time the family line has continued down the female side and the name of Lygon has been lost, but this remarkable ancient family line will continue and be remembered for many years, mainly embodied in the fabric of this magnificent house.

## **Madresfield and Worcester visit**

With much of the information from our talk still fresh in our minds we set off for an eagerly awaited visit to Madresfield Court. Our driver managed to negotiate the narrow entrance gates and we arrived in the reception area ready for the tour. The exterior looked magnificent enough with its Victorian alterations maintaining the Tudor style, but the interior could not fail to impress. The extensive range of furnishings of both English and French origin was allied with fine examples of Arts and Crafts pieces. The Library and the Chapel were particularly notable, the former for its carved wooden panels depicting the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge, and the latter for its impressive frescoed walls. These were painted using egg tempera and the colours seemed still as fresh as they were when painted nearly 100 years ago.

There was so much to see that some details have become a little blurred but I recall some magnificent fireplaces, an impressive number of paintings and portraits covering several periods of history, and the beautiful balustrade with twisted glass balusters in the amazing staircase and hall, beyond which one runs out of superlatives! Those who had visited before said that they discover something different on each visit and the house certainly warrants more than one visit, particularly as time did not permit an exploration of the grounds and its maze.

Madresfield has no facilities for lunch so we then travelled to Worcester Cathedral where a soup and sandwich lunch was provided in the Guesten on College Green. The cathedral is particularly notable this year as it contains the tomb of King John who signed the Magna Carta 800 years ago this month. The statue on the tomb is the only known representation of this monarch. He was much revered by the Victorians who raised his tomb on an impressively decorated base.



Our guided tour took us down into the extensive Norman crypt, the ancient cloisters and chapter house and the choir stalls where the first performance of Elgar's Enigma Variations was held at the Three Choirs Festival in 1899. The cathedral is also notable for its ring of 15 bells, tuned so that peals can be rung in either a major or a minor key. The final part of the visit involved climbing the 235 steps to the top of the tower from where we were treated to a wonderful explanation of the actions of the battle of Worcester in 1651

by our tour guide Howard Robinson from a small viewing platform enabling a complete panoramic view of the city and the rivers Severn and Teme. Our tired legs were more than grateful for the sight of the coach awaiting our return journey after a very full and memorable day.

*This photograph from the top of the cathedral shows the Commandery, the Royalist Command Post in the Battle of Worcester, left of centre. Above and beyond it, top left, is Fort Royal, the site of the fortifications constructed by the Royalists in 1651.*



## Barley Beer and Barrels

The talk which followed the AGM was given by Martin Way who, following a career in teaching is now a guide at the Wychwood Brewery in Witney. His talk is almost certainly the most full and lucid account of brewing and associated activities that many of us had heard.

Ale, he explained, as distinct from Beer, was quite insipid as it contained no hops. Hops were once considered sinful, but around 1540 the Bishops decided that hops were OK.

Beer requires 3 ingredients – water, malt and hops. The best water comes from Burton so local waters are “Burtonised” by heating to 95 deg F to burn off chlorines etc. and then gypsum is added. Dark beers need soft water so salt is added. Some breweries, e g Hook Norton, have their own artesian wells.

Malt is normally barley or wheat. Martin passed around samples of grain for tasting that had been roasted for different types of beer, from pale malts which were caramelised at 52 deg F to the “crystal” malts for the darker beers and the black, or chocolate, malts for stouts such as Guinness. They were all very palatable and showed the differences in flavour that are achieved by roasting.

Hops belong to the cannabis family! They add bitterness to beer and preserve it, but they are only harvested in 2 weeks of the year and don't last - after 12 months they cannot be used. They are preserved by freeze drying and then compressed, or turned into pellets. Martin explained the old practice of “hopping” where families from London's East End were transported to Kent and Sussex for hop picking. This was part of their social life and also a vital part of their annual income. They took everything they needed for the time they were away, chairs, stoves etc. and stayed in tents or later, tin shacks. Dad had to stay behind to work. The hop vines were cut down and then the women and children picked off the flowers and filled five-bushel baskets. The “tallyman” would mark off each basket by means of tally sticks which he wore around his waist. Each “stick” consisted of 2 halves of the same piece of wood, the stock and the share. Each full basket was marked across both parts of the stick and the tallyman would keep the stocks to compare with the pickers' shares to determine their pay. The baskets were emptied into a sack called a “poke”. By the mid 1940's cheaper imported hops threatened the custom of hopping, and despite the protests of the pickers who were losing vital income the practice died out. But hops were still a labour intensive business as they had to be dried in Oast Houses then compressed very tightly into a hop sack.

Brewing is a process of putting the grain through a grist mill and adding water, or liquor as it's known in the brewery, to turn the starch into sugar, producing “wort” which is boiled in a copper. The hops are then added in a “whirlpool” and finally yeast added to start fermentation.

One brewery worth mentioning, Wadworth's of Devizes, has all the traditional skills associated with brewing on site, from brewers to sign writers and coopers, and uses horse drawn drays. The Health & Safety brigade tried to ban the latter but the police intervened saying they were the best form of traffic calming known!



*Wadworth's Brewery*



Casks or barrels are now alloy or stainless steel at £50 a go compared with a traditional wooden cask at around £750. Martin then gave a description of the skill (art?) of coopering using an impressive collection of tools which would be unknown to a cabinet maker. This fascinating demonstration showed all the different skills needed to create a barrel, a task which has proved impossible to re-create on a computer!

The talk finished with some interesting stories – the fact that when Parliament was burnt down one of the contributory factors was a large collection of tally sticks stored in the basement which had become tinder dry over the years!

#### *Hook Norton Brewery*

Nowadays traditional English beer is sold all over the world. Wychwoods' "Hobgoblin" ale is particularly popular around Hallowe'en due to the wicked looking goblin on the label. This was initially refused an export licence in the USA. They objected to the goblin's axe with its dripping blood as being too scary for children to see on the shelves, so it was changed. As Martin said, "they can go down the corner store, buy a gun and mow down their classmates, but aren't allowed to see a bloodied axe!"

This absorbing talk had provoked much interest and also a great need to research the practical side of the business and test the results, so after some questions a visit to one of the local hostelries was called for to round off yet another splendid evening talk!

### **Book launch**

Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> June at the Old Stocks saw the launch of the book "Magna Carta in 20 Places" written by our committee member, journalist and historian Derek Taylor. Derek introduced the book by declaring his lifelong fascination for this historic document, and for the reign of King John, whose reputation he considered had been much maligned. He read a passage from the book describing the occasion when King John was visiting Angoulême and his eye fell upon the beautiful 12 year old Isabella who was preparing to be married. To recount the subsequent intriguing events would spoil the ending, for which you will need to read the full account in the book. Suffice to say it was a most convivial event to introduce this fascinating book.

### **Town Tours**

We have had an encouraging handful of volunteers for this activity and most of them have received a limited amount of training. The first requirement is a thorough knowledge of the history of the Town and there is no substitute for reading the various books on the subject. Glimpses of the Past, our own Civic Society publication, is an excellent start, and the Victoria County History of Gloucestershire is probably the most authoritative work. A copy is held in the Library but it is also published on line. Attendance at a number of tours is needed to gain experience – I followed Jean Oxley around for many tours before I felt confident enough to tackle one on my own as the American visitors are remarkably well informed on English history and can ask some penetrating questions! One cannot know all the answers of course, but just looking up the answers later adds to one's own sum of knowledge. Armed with a wide range of knowledge they can be confidently tackled and, given such intelligent and interested groups, are very enjoyable.

## **Visit from Kettering**

The Friends of the Alfred East Gallery and the Kettering Civic Society are planning to visit Stow on Sat 25<sup>th</sup> July, and would like to have a Town Tour and a visit to Upper Swell to see some of the scenes painted by Sir Alfred East working from his studio there. Unfortunately St Edward's Hall is booked for that weekend, but depending on numbers we may be able to accommodate them in the Cricket Museum for a small reception. Afterwards it will also depend on numbers for the Town Tour and for those interested in a trip to Upper Swell, for which a Villager bus may be needed as their coach is much too large to park there or to turn around. We may need to hold 2 Town Tours if there is sufficient demand, and the visitors to Upper Swell will need to be guided around the village as the landscape views are not easy to locate for those unfamiliar with the local geography. As I cannot split myself between the two locations very easily then someone else may be required to conduct a Town Tour. Let's hope some of the new trainees are up to the task by then!

## **The Wells**

Last month the Wells had another good clean and the rampant vegetation was cut back. The working party did a tremendous job, and at the Lower Well the undergrowth was cleared to reveal what we think is the fabled third well, the Humble Bee Well. It is just a metal tank without any apparent water feed, but it seems that it might have been used at one time. We filled a skip, kindly provided by STC, at the Upper Well, but the debris was just piled up at the Lower Well where it still remains awaiting another skip to be provided.

## **Website**

Our excellent website, under the expert management of Derek Taylor, continues to attract attention from all over the world, though a straw poll showed that fewer than 50% of members have accessed it. We have now acquired additional capacity enabling the inclusion of more notices and information including links to short videos on sites such as YouTube. It will become more of a "noticeboard" as it develops and members are encouraged to access it more frequently as an ever-changing, updated resource.

## **Battlefield Survey**

The battlefield survey is still planned to go ahead in October. It will be very much scaled down from the original proposal due to the limited funds available, and will be carried out by a small team of experienced battlefield detectorists under Simon Marsh. Unlike the initial HLF lottery bid, there is no provision or requirement for education or community involvement and they would prefer to work without any publicity at this stage to avoid any unauthorised disturbance or intrusion into the area to be surveyed. Depending on their findings we would hope to have some confirmation of the actual area in which the battle took place which could lead to a further more detailed future survey, but it is essential to avoid any "treasure hunters" carrying out their own exploration of the area. A recent talk at Banbury by Glenn Foard, the leading archaeologist for the Bosworth Field project, emphasised the importance of protecting battlefields from disturbance as new techniques are always being developed to provide more accurate archaeological assessment. In particular the practice of holding re-enactments on the actual battlefield site, as is done at Tewkesbury, completely destroys any chance of future discoveries. Fortunately Stow does not have that problem.

**VISIT TO THE CITY OF BATH**  
**Thursday, 17<sup>th</sup> September 2015**

We have arranged a special day trip to the beautiful city of Bath to enjoy fully guided tours around two of the city's iconic, but very different, historic sites.

**No 1 ROYAL CRESCENT**

Our day begins privately on arrival with coffee and biscuits and an introductory talk at **No 1 ROYAL CRESCENT**, described by 'The Times' as "*the best address in Bath.*" This beautiful Grade I Georgian townhouse, designed by John Wood the Younger, was built in 1767 as the first house in the Royal Crescent. The well loved Bath stone crescent of 30 houses, with a uniform Palladian design to the front facade, was the culmination of the 18<sup>th</sup> century development of Bath. The house was originally the residence of Henry Sandford who lived there from 1776 until his death 20 years later. The Sandford family had settled in Ireland after being granted land in 1666 for services to the crown during the Civil War and became highly respected and wealthy landowners. Henry was no exception – enabling him to lease this house in Bath's most prestigious location.

The individual rooms with their special collections have been influenced by what was known about the occupants of the house, its social history and by historic figures associated with Bath – bringing the house vividly to life.

We also have the chance to view an unmissable free exhibition of miniature – or dolls' – houses from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries including 'The Fry House' made in Bristol for the children of local chocolate-maker Francis Fry (c 1840) and the Georgian 'Bellamy House' displayed with all its original furnishings. You may then wish to walk at leisure (approx 15 minute downhill walk) into the centre of Bath, enjoying the architecture, cafes and shops along the way, or hop back onto the coach to drop you near The Abbey in the centre. There are so many places for lunch, visiting – or shopping! But please be ready to meet for a **prompt 2.30 p.m. start at The Roman Baths.**

**THE ROMAN BATHS**

Everyone *thinks* they know The Roman Baths – but have you been there recently? Bath was founded upon natural hot springs with the steaming water playing a key role throughout its history and the Roman Baths, constructed c 70 AD as a grand bathing and socialising complex, is now one of the best preserved Roman remains in the world. Daily life in the city's baths and temple in Roman times is explained through the newly-installed interactive and imaginative animated displays and reconstructions which allow a fresh exploration of the extensive ruins and treasures of this site. We will have the services of a private tour guide for our group to explore one of the finest historic sites in Northern Europe.

(The baths themselves are 6 metres below street level and so there are a number of steps to climb during our visit. Lifts and improved handrails make access easier but please make staff aware of any limited mobility you may have and they will direct you to the most accessible route.)

\* Just a few thoughts if you are considering where to have lunch. Please bear in mind that we are visiting Bath during the week of The Jane Austen Festival and places may become busier than usual around lunchtime. There are plenty of cafes and snack/sandwich bars around the centre of Bath. The friendly Roman Baths Kitchen (cafe) is immediately opposite the main entrance to the Roman Baths. The formal Pump Room restaurant is one of the city's most elegant places to enjoy stylish, modern-British cuisine but **booking for lunch in advance is strictly advisable.** Tel: 01225 444477 or see menu and book on-line.

**See separate booking form enclosed**