



BERKHAMSTED LOCAL HISTORY AND MUSEUM SOCIETY

Registered Charity No. 803417

www.berkhamsted-history.org.uk

Founded 1950 as Berkhamsted & District Local History Society

Spring Newsletter 2019

Hello everyone, Spring is in the air, isn't it good to see the spring flowers out as the days gradually lengthen and we can feel some warmth on our faces.

Dr Graham Twemlow came to talk to us about artists in the Chilterns on January 16th concerned mainly with the western Chilterns, - Piper, Nash and Gill. Kathleen Tyson spoke to us on February 13th about her research into a near contemporary account of the Conquest and set the cat among the pigeons by saying that William didn't come to Berkhamsted. But she sweetened this piece of news by saying that William's forbears might have come from East Anglia. She gave us much food for thought

Berkhamsted Castle Trust

Adrian Barham, a BLHMS committee member, is chairman of this Trust and he reports: A local company has made a 'geophys' survey of the castle and their report will be available by the Summer. In conjunction with English Heritage, work towards the preparation of a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for the Castle is well in hand, with the appointed Consultants due to attend an on-site meeting in the near future before finalising the work plan to deliver the report by the summer. The Castle will also play host to around 50+ castle specialists in April as the annual conference of the *Castle Studies Group*, taking place not far away in Northamptonshire, and will devote half a day to on-site study at Berkhamsted.

Preparations are well underway for the Castle visitors' room re-opening over the Easter bank holiday weekend, followed by the usual summer opening regime of weekends from May to September. The Trust is extremely grateful to the many volunteers from BLHMS and other local heritage organisations who generously give their time to help members of the public to understand the historical significance of the Castle. If you would be interested in helping out at the Castle – either in the visitors' room or in some other capacity – do please get in touch. E-mail: enquiries@berkhamstedcastle.org.uk

We would like to acknowledge and thank Sandra Lawman for her wonderful work on the committee as programme Secretary. Sandra steps down from this role at the AGM.

Summer Outings We run these with the Probus Club Most cost £25-£35. If you are not a NT member then the costs of entrance is higher.

Monday 17th June: Spencer House, Royal Academy, RAF Club

Last year we went to Althorp, the Spencer country house, and this visit is to their London house. It has been lavishly restored by the Rothschild Foundation (the Rothschilds were across Green Park). Danny Bonwit has invited a *restricted* number to have lunch with him at the RAF club in Piccadilly at a modest cost (£20-£30). If you didn't want to partake then you can go to the Royal Academy in Piccadilly.

Thursday August 1st: Chastleton House and Snowhill Manor

Both of these are near Moreton in Marsh and National Trust. Chastleton House is a time capsule; nothing has changed from the over 400 years of family life hidden away in this Cotswold valley. It was used in the BBC *Wolf Hall*. Snowhill was the home with his collection of an eccentric, Charles Wade, an artist and architect.

Thursday, 12th September Cliveden house and gardens. This is near Beaconsfield and so the journey is quite good. Amazing setting overlooking the Thames. Historic House, some rooms *MAY* be open, but lavishly changed by the Astor family and notorious for the Profumo/Christine Keeler affair. (You can see the swimming pool!) Afterwards we drop down to the Thames below and visit the

Stanley Spencer gallery and have a guided tour there and a guided walk around Spencer's Cookham. If you are interested get in touch with Bill Willett. 01442863760 or bill@billwillett.co.uk

Andrew Holder who organises the Castle visitor room will be circulating the Rota for the Summer season and always welcomes new recruits.

Heritage Open Days celebrate their 25th year of this nationally organised event in which BLHMS has participated for about 20 years. 13th-22nd September, we are beginning to plan our programme. If you have any suggestions, ideas, improvements, reintroductions please contact Jenny Sherwood ksherwood9100@aol.com or 01442 865158

"Berkhamsted in WW1". We are very pleased to see this book which we produced together with **"Men of Berkhamsted-Lest we forget"** given a very favourable review in the latest edition of the *"Local Historian"* - the journal of the British Association for Local History. It was reviewed in a chapter titled *"Aspects of the First World War"* by Sally Sokoloff and John Buckell. The book has sold well, and a few copies are still available at our meetings or from Jenny or Janice.

Herts Association of Local History (HALS). BLHMS is an affiliate member of this society. The Spring meeting takes place on 18th May 2019 and will be dedicated to celebrating the legacy of Lionel Munby who died ten years ago.

Our new talks programme resumes on Weds 18th September with a talk by Adam Smith on *Tring Park-Wren & the Rothschilds Architecture*.

Finally, Richard North writes this brief note about The Sexton's Grave Book



John Randall is 1st left on back row whilst his father, William, is 1st right front row.

One of the 'treasures' of St Mary's Northchurch, is the handwritten Sextons grave book. The inside of the flyleaf shows the date May 18th, 1852 and records the names of some of the former Sextons at the church, the first listed being John Alman, who was the Sexton and Parish Clerk and died on 14th September 1707. Unfortunately, several pages at the start of the book appear to have been removed, with the first entry being dated May 8th, 1865. A total of 349 burials are listed up to 1917, of which 101 were of children.

For much of the period covered by the book, the Sextons came from the same family, the Randalls. The first of these, James Randall, became Parish Clerk and Sexton around 1862. After twenty years, he was succeeded by his son, George, who continued in the roll for a further ten years. George, in turn, was succeeded by his elder brother, William, a local market gardener who raised his plants on land owned by the Diocese of St Albans opposite his home in New Road, Northchurch. The school playground now stands in this site. William was also a founder member of the Berkhamsted Co-operative Society. Both he and his son, John, were also keen bell ringers at St Mary's church. As William's health started to decline, it was John who took over much of his work as Sexton, as well as

the running of the market garden business. William Randall died in the late summer of 1912, aged 61, and it was John who dug his grave. John was officially appointed Sexton the following Easter.

The Sexton's grave book abruptly ends on 6th January 1917, with the burial of Arthur Sutherland. In May the previous year, John had received his conscription papers under the Military Service Act and despite appealing to the local Military Tribunal, he was forced to report to the Recruiting Officer at Watford. Following his training, John was posted to 11th Battalion, Essex Regiment and left for France. On 28th June 1917, John took part in a raid on a fortified German redoubt near Loos. Although the raid was successful, John was subsequently reported as 'missing in action'. It was not until the end of the war that John's fate was known. He had been severely wounded during the raid and captured by the Germans. Despite receiving medical attention, he died on 2nd July. His body was buried, but in the subsequent fighting in the area its location was lost, there being no Sexton's grave book to record it in.

Hope to see you on the trips or at our talks later in the year. Please support both.

Mary Casserley
Chairman, March 2019