

Meeting Reviews 2008/2009

Winchester Bible, 18th October 2008



At our AGM this year we had a splendid illustrated talk by John Hardacre, sometime curator of Winchester Cathedral Library, on the Winchester Bible. The Bible, commissioned by Henri de Blois in the 12th century is now bound in four volumes, the vellum pages about the size of a broadsheet newspaper. It is the work, with one small exception, of a single scribe. Although the text is complete, the artwork is not, which gives a fascinating insight into the methods of the artists. There are beautiful line drawings awaiting paint and gilding, another drawing has had the gold leaf applied but no colour, but thankfully many are complete.

These are historiated initials with lavish use of gold and lapis lazuli (more costly than gold) and as fresh today as they were 900 years ago. It appears that the work stopped when Henri de Blois died in 1170AD presumably because no one else was prepared to take on the enormous cost, but the Bible remains one of England's greatest treasures. Image to the left of the text is from *The Winchester Bible*, Claire Donovan, The British Library – Winchester Cathedral, 1993. Copies available from the Winchester Cathedral Shop.

Discovery Evening, 13th November 2008



Group members Michael Edwards and Roger Warr presented images from the digitised records that they have been working on recently. Michael gave a commentary on images in the Group's records that show the development and decline of the short-lived, but historically interesting Didcot Newbury and Southampton railway. The images produced by Michael of Worthy Down Halt, Kings Worthy Station, and the locomotives that used the line were surprisingly clear and extensive. The line worked to capacity during both world wars, but traffic later declined and the line closed in 1964.

The line is now a very attractive walkway through woods and beside fields from Kings Worthy to South Wonston. Roger gave a very interesting view of the Worthys based on reading through the Group's scrapbooks assembled since the mid-1980s. If an historian in 50 years time were to base his understanding of the Worthys on the scrapbooks, (that is, on newspaper interests and interpretations), then he or she would be struck by the frequent recurrence of charity events, petty crime/vandalism, and disputes about planning applications. Against this background, certain major events, such as the controversy over building the Tubbs Hall and over building the Church Rooms, stand out. Perhaps the Group needs to balance the media's negative points of view on petty crime and vandalism with an article that puts them into perspective.

Annual Party, 9th January 2009

Members gathered at the Church Rooms on an exceptionally cold evening for our Annual Party. With outside temperatures as low as -8 degrees we all enjoyed an evening of good conversation and good food. Some members actually discussed matters of historical interest! The party gives members a chance to get together in a totally informal setting and swap anecdotes and experiences. A good evening was had by all.

The Growth of Nature Conservation in Hampshire, 12th February 2009

Richard Hedley, a longstanding member of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust spoke about the development of nature conservation, especially in Hampshire. In a thoughtful introduction he traced the early systematic study of plants, birds and animals from the 17th century onwards. When war across Europe stopped young aristocrats from going on the Grand Tour, they started visiting Scotland, Wales, the Lake District, and discovered their beauty. They were quickly followed by artists, notably Turner, so that the wildlife and natural beauty on our doorsteps became better known. Not much later, photography arrived, giving naturalists the perfect tool for recording their observations. The Industrial Revolution and the growth of towns lent enchantment to the countryside and a fresh incentive to preserve it from over-development, a theme that has increased in importance ever since. Bicycles provided the ideal way of exploring the countryside and its wildlife, while the invasion of all areas, especially the coast, by trains and later the motor car, meant access for all, with the accompanying dangers of vandalism and harm to natural habitats. This introduction acted as a reminder and backdrop for the coming of organisations like the Wildlife Trusts, the Field Clubs and the National Trust, all in their different ways dedicated to exploring and protecting the countryside and the coast and their wildlife. The Hampshire Naturalists Trust started around 1960 and quickly began to acquire areas of natural beauty which were cared for by wardens, and made available for visitors. Some of the best known of these areas are St Catherine's Hill, Old Winchester Hill, Farlington Marshes, Testwood and Blashford Lakes and our local Winnall Moors. In 1993 the name was changed to the Wildlife Trust, partly to avoid confusion with certain other lovers of the great outdoors-the naturalists! The scope and success of the Trust continues to grow, with volunteers joining the Wardens in conservation work, and with membership always rising. The present membership is 27,000! The Trust works closely with the County Council and the Environment Agency and receives grants from them. The evening finished with some very old slides which reminded us of a Hampshire without motorways where walkers could move around with greater safety. Richard's enthusiasm and lightness of touch ensured a most enjoyable evening, and perhaps a few more members for the Trust.

Anglo Saxon Churches, 12th March 2009



Our speaker began with a brief historical introduction, reminding us that Christianity first came to Britain in late Roman times, as the remains of Christian buildings, for example at Silchester and Lullingstone, have demonstrated. The descendants of these early Christians fled westwards when the pagan Anglo Saxons and Jutes arrived in the 5th and 6th century, sailing westwards up the rivers, and settling down as farmers and traders. Cemeteries provide the best evidence of this early period, such as the one excavated at Worthy Park in the 1970s by Sonia Chadwick. Pagan graves contained valuable grave goods such as weapons and jewellery. By the late 7th century, grave goods were only rarely found, suggesting that the Christian practice of inhumation was taking over as the conversion progressed.

Touching on the documentary sources, especially the Venerable Bede, Kay sketched in the story of the conversion, also reminding us that the Celtic or Irish Christians played a key role in Northumbria, alongside the missionaries from Rome. In 597 and throughout the 7th century, missionaries arrived from the continent and began to convert the Anglo Saxons to Christianity, beginning in Kent where king Ethelbert's Frankish wife was already a Christian. She gave protection to St Augustine and his group of monks. Canterbury was probably the site of the earliest Anglo-Saxon chapel. Little remains of these early buildings as they were timber built and extremely vulnerable. Gradually, as the kings and nobles of the kingdoms of the east and north of Britain listened to the missionaries of Rome, Christianity spread, and larger churches were built, often using the stone remaining from Roman buildings. Brixworth, Escomb and Bradford on Avon are some of the finest surviving examples. By about 700, all seven Anglo-Saxon kingdoms had become Christian, either by intermarriage of the royal families, by alliances or by conquest. Bishops were appointed and the beginnings of later dioceses were sketched out. Then came the first Viking raids, when monasteries and churches were ransacked, leaving devastation behind. The Vikings made off to their Scandinavian

homelands or went to attack other parts of Europe. By the late 9th century, many of the Vikings, or Danes as they were now called, decided to settle in England, as the Anglo Saxons had before them. They took possession of a large area in East Anglia and north east England which was known as the Danelaw. The surviving kingdoms formed a confederation under Alfred, king of Wessex, and in due course their army defeated the Danish 'host', as their army was called. Probably the most famous event in Anglo Saxon history was Alfred's victory at Edington in 878. This resulted in a treaty by which the Danish leader Guthrum agreed to be baptized, while continuing to occupy the Danelaw. Alfred was recognized as the king of all England. Next our speaker took us through some of the main architectural features of the Saxon style of building, referring several times to St Swithun's, Headbourne Worthy. By the mid 10th century much larger stone churches came into being, of which the Old Minster at Winchester was one of the finest. Some features from the Continent were copied, such as central towers and twin towers which were often used to keep treasures secure and even to provide accommodation for the priest. There were no bells in the Saxon period. One of the best ways of recognizing Saxon work, especially on the exterior walls, is from the so called long and short work, on the corners or quoins of the masonry, which echoes the timber framed structure of earlier churches. This feature is clearly visible at Headbourne Worthy. Very little late Saxon sculpture survives, but Headbourne Worthy has the remains or imprint of a Rood or Cross, showing Christ on the cross, with Mary and St John on either side. This is a rarity indeed. It was greatly damaged at the Reformation. The dimensions of Saxon churches tend to be high and narrow. Windows are small with single or double splay, usually with rounded arches, but sometimes triangular. These are often decorated with hooded mouldings. Chancel arches spanned the width of the church which was often quite narrow. Kay packed a wealth of detail into her talk. We all felt enthused, and better prepared to go in search of the fascinating details of Saxon churches which still remain, as well as the more complete buildings of the period which escaped the next major rebuilding after the Norman conquest. We felt she had opened up to us five hundred years which are too often overlooked, and during which the kingdom of England came into being.

Fishing in the Chalk Streams, 9th April 2009

Fishermen and non-fishermen alike will have found much of interest in Bob's well presented, illustrated talk. He began by emphasizing the nature and importance of our clear, chalk streams – a huge proportion of which are to be found in the south eastern portion of this country. With the right weed and flies, and therefore fish, they indicate the purity of the system and generate much revenue from both local fishermen and those from as far away as Japan and the United States. Our attention was drawn to the value of the adjoining water meadows which, when well managed, allow all year round agricultural use. The 'carriers', too, are of great importance to spawning fish. The diverse nature of the river flora was shown – water crowfoot heading the list of good plants – and we were told of the importance of weed cutting. A careful balance must be maintained between too much cutting and not cutting sufficient weed; the latter would clog up the stream. Well cut weed will encourage flies, leave fish free movement and cover, and help to regulate the flow of water. One can observe a distinct pattern where the job has been well done. Several important flies were mentioned, the best known and most interesting to most people being the mayfly. Feeding on the insects are the brown trout (some wild, some stocked) rainbow trout (mainly stocked and found in lakes) and grayling (a wild fish) There are also pike – predators who need to be removed and, nearer the sea, the sea trout, salmon and crayfish (both our indigenous sort and the larger, unwelcome, American Red intruder). We heard about famous fishermen – Isaak Walton, of course, who is commemorated in a side chapel of Winchester Cathedral. Also two famous, local rivals, Halford and Skues. Of course there are many others including Sir Edward Grey (Foreign Secretary 1906-1917) who loved, and wrote about, fishing on the Itchen.. Nowadays well known people still come to fish locally, these include Khalid Aziz, Peter Ramsbotham and Jeremy Paxman and books are still being written e.g. 'On Fishing' by Brian Clarke – who fishes our streams and 'You Should Have Been Here Last Thursday' by a retired Itchen river keeper, Ron Holloway. We were able to handle various types of old and new fishing rods and reels and told about other necessary tackle and were surprised to hear that one of the best known manufacturers was 'Ritz' (as in Ritz Hotel). Finally, the problems facing our chalk streams had to be mentioned. These include discharge of waste, seepage of phosphates, litter, abstraction, maintaining correct water levels and alien plants. Many books were mentioned – some in, and some out of, print which can be found in new and second hand bookshops. In conclusion we were shown a picture of the iconic, little blue 'Rod Box' van.

Historic Dress, 14th May 2009

With slides and actual samples we were shown many items which the service has purchased or been given over the years and which can be found in various museums in the county. The collection contains embroideries from the 17th century and dress and accessories from the 18th century onwards as well as Christening gowns, patchwork quilts, smocks, fashion plates and paper patterns. Textiles show the range of fabrics and designs and methods of decoration for both clothing and domestic furnishings. In 1991 the Museum Service, with grant aid from the V & A and other sources, was able to purchase the magnificent Basing House Tapestry. This shows a grand house and the motto of the Paulet family and dates to about 1660 following the restoration of Charles 2nd to the throne. Charles himself is shown standing in front of a canopied throne as his Queen, Catherine of Braganza, and her ladies approach. The tapestry is a wonderful piece of 'raised work' or 'stump work' – a three dimensional form of embroidery. Another local treasure is a brown silk pelisse c1814, said to have been worn by Jane Austen and given to the museum by descendants of her brother John. A pelisse was a garment half way between a coat and a dress and usually calf length. It has long close fitting sleeves, a high up-standing collar and is open at the front with no fastenings. It would have been worn over a cotton gown which would have shown several inches below the pelisse hem. Judging from the size of the garment, Jane Austen must have been a very slender lady! A beautifully embroidered silk waistcoat and a long velvet coat with silk trimming are among the items of men's fashionable clothing in the Hampshire collection. Among many other interesting facts we learned that the first fearsome looking corsets which would have been worn over a cotton garment were made of leather by men's tailors; blacksmiths mended broken crinoline hoops and horsehair was used to pad bustles. Smocks, the outdoor wear of country people, were made locally by Burberry in Basingstoke. Frequent exhibitions are arranged in various parts of the county and we realised that Hampshire is fortunate indeed to have such a wealth of material and the expertise of its archivists.

Tichborne: Landscape, Church and Chapels, 11th June 2009



On the 11 June and on a beautiful summer evening a group of 31 walkers took a stroll through Tichborne to explore physical and historical aspects of this interesting and picturesque parish. The walk was led by Derek Brockway who explained the features of the countryside as we made our way along field tracks from Godwin's Farm to the village and onward to Tichborne House. The name 'Tichborne' is derived from the Itchen bourne which runs through the parish and the grounds of Tichborne House. The parish is an elongated area five miles long and one and a half miles wide. As Derek pointed out as we looked across the landscape, this shape is similar to adjacent parishes and provides Tichborne with the three elements so important to medieval agricultural economy: chalk up-lands providing sheep pasture, woodland, and water meadows.

He drew a comparison with Kings Worthy, the land areas being not too different: Tichborne 3260 acres and King Worthy 2253 acres. A significant comment, amongst many, was that whereas the 1841 census showed a population of 339 in Tichborne and 171 in Kings Worthy, in the year 2000 the populations were 192 and approximately 4000 respectively. From the fields we moved on to the ancient parish church of St Andrew, which stands on a knoll overlooking a beautiful valley. The chancel dates from the mid-eleventh century, but what is particularly significant is that the north aisle is a Catholic chapel – a privilege granted to the Tichborne family by King James I. Canon Paul Townsend of St Peter's Church, Winchester, a friend and former pastor of the owners of Tichborne House, spoke of the history of the chapel, of the Tichborne dole and of the family, which had remained Catholic through penal times to the present day. We then walked through the village to Tichborne House to visit the private family chapel where again Canon Townsend addressed us. There has been a chapel in the house since early medieval times, but the present chapel dates from 1803 when it was built after the Tudor house was burnt down. It was regularly used by local people until 2000, from when all services have been conducted in St Gregory's church, Alresford. All enjoyed the exhilarating walk and were unanimous in their appreciation of the commentaries by Derek and Canon Townsend. The evening was rounded off by an excellent meal at The Cricketers Arms in Alresford.

Romsey Abbey Visit, 11th July 2009



Our July outing took us to Romsey Abbey. We all gathered late morning at the Abbey, on the day of the “Beggars Fair”, to be met by our guide, one-time policeman Bob Smith, resplendent in his blue cassock. There followed a most interesting guided tour enlivened with plenty of interesting facts and amusing anecdotes. The first convent church was founded in 907 AD on an island in the marsh, around which Romsey, named for its location, eventually developed. Destroyed by the Vikings in 960 AD, the rebuilt convent and church housed mainly high-born widows and spinsters and became a wealthy institution. After a blunt refusal by the Abbess to the local request to use the Minster Church as their parish church, the bishop insisted and the North Aisle became used by the local people for their worship.

This explains the presence of the Norman font (now a 19th century copy) in the North Aisle, under a decorated ceiling and boss carrying St Anne’s image, there being little need one would think for a font in a convent church! By 1539 the convent had declined and only a rather dissolute community of 25 nuns remained, together it is said with a menagerie including a pet monkey and goats, and some dalliance with the delights of the surrounding town. The nuns were duly ejected from the Abbey by Henry VIII’s commissioners! An appeal to the authorities by the local congregation to preserve the church as their local parish church resulted in its sale to the Parish for £100, supported by four wealthy benefactors. A number of rebuilds and extensions has resulted in the Abbey Church comprising mixed styles and many interesting architectural quirks, the style of arches changing abruptly along the central Aisle. The church is built to a standard plan on a raft of about 12 foot thick flint and mortar, carrying it above the wet ground. A Saxon rood from about 960 AD, in St Anne’s Chapel, shows typical features with Our Lord’s head upright and with branches sprouting from the base of the cross, depicting the Tree of Life. Found face-in in the wall during Victorian structural work in 1860, it had possibly been hidden to protect it from Henry VIII’s commissioners. Another Saxon carved stone rood (c1000AD) can be seen in the wall outside the south side of the Abbey beside the Nun’s Door, complete with alcove and chimney for a light. It had doubtless been protected from Cromwellian destruction by the shed which had surrounded it. The Nun’s Door on the inside of the Church is now out of use and is covered by a stunning appliqué curtain portraying saints and made in 1961 by students of the Southampton College of Art. The Abbey Church is full of interesting features, ancient and modern, and has a fascinating and surprising history. We left just as a wedding party was assembling, with our minds full of images, architectural, social and historical. Well worth a leisurely revisit in the future.