

Meeting reviews 2011/12

Problems of a Conservation Officer in Winchester



On 15th October Andrew Rutter, former Conservation Officer, talked to the group about his interesting career in conservation and planning in Winchester. Andrew's ability to draw was clear from the drawings of Winchester scenes which were displayed. This ability was incredibly useful during his career because it showed what the impact of a development would be on a town. Andrew's first success was saving ruinous buildings next to The Globe on the Lake in Alresford. The Brewery wanted to demolish them and build a car park. The buildings have now been restored. Another success was limiting the development of the Chesil area. Initially plans were for a multi-storey car park, hostel and office block which would have had a serious impact on St Giles Hill. These were rejected, with the help of Andrew's drawings, and just a smaller multi-storey car park was built instead. Andrew's drawings also helped during the long discussions on how best to deal with the M3 extension scheme by showing the affect on the landscape of the first plans. Andrew was influential in changing the look of Winchester High Street by producing a policy for signage. He challenged 600 signs to be removed as they were not in-keeping with the look of the city. Historic symbol signs were recommended and Andrew made cardboard mock-ups to see what they would look like. Today you can see the finished results including the boot above Clarks and the teapot above Whittards.

Butser Ancient Farm



On 10th November Fergus Milton talked to the group about Butser Ancient Farm, the replica Iron Age farm and experimental archaeological site near Petersfield. Fergus spoke about the origins of the farm, the education research, the site today, recent changes and what is planned for the future. The Butser Ancient Farm project was established in 1972 by Dr Peter Reynolds who taught archaeology and was interested in using experimental archaeology to prove or disprove theories. The site today is the 4th site used and the farm has been there for 15 years. There are animals and crops on site which are typical of the Iron Age including Manx Lockton sheep and Emmer wheat. In the Iron Age there were no rabbits so the staff have had to build an underground fence to keep them away from the crops! However the main part of the site is the enclosure which is made up of roundhouses, storage pits, a latrine, forge, granary, Roman villa and so on. The Roman villa's construction was based on one David Johnston excavated near Sparsholt. Visitors to the site today include 15,000 students per year from school up to university age. There are also open weekends for the public to take a tour around and try out wattle and daub. The group enjoyed Fergus' talk and we are hoping to arrange a visit to the farm in 2012. For more information on Butser Ancient Farm please see their website:- www.butserancientfarm.co.uk

18th Century Houses and Gardens



On 12th January Nicola Pink, who has worked for the Hampshire Record Office and the National Trust, talked to the group about eighteenth century houses and gardens. She used many examples of properties to illustrate her talk and included contemporary quotes to show how people of the time reacted to the building styles. Nicola began her talk by briefly describing house and garden styles leading up to the eighteenth century. There were the Medieval properties which were defensive and feudal through to the neat Dutch style houses, such as Uppark, of the late seventeenth century. It wasn't just the houses that looked neat, the gardens were formal and ornamental with gravel walk ways, fountains, cascades and topiary. By the eighteenth century this style became thought of as autocratic and oppressive and thus a new style of gardens and houses began. One of the motivations for the change was the wealthy young men who became influenced by classical style art and architecture which they saw on their grand tours. Once home they wished to replicate this Arcadian style in their own properties. Nicky divided the eighteenth century into three distinct ages each represented by a particular style of house and garden. The

first was Palladianism and was based on the work of Andrea Palladio. Houses were graceful and understated, they were built to strict ratios of height and width. An example of a neo Palladian villa is Chiswick House in London. In their grounds, followers of this style adopted a political or philosophical theme with allegorical features. Stourhead is an example of this style. The second era was less restrictive though still classical. Broadlands was refaced in this style. Gardens became less pretentious and ostentatious and the work of Capability Brown became favoured. Typical features were sloping turf to an informal water feature, clumps of indigenous trees and animals grazing in the park. This necessitated the creation of a ha-ha, a sunken wall ditch which prevented the animals from getting too close to the house and unlike a fence, it did not ruin the view. Blenheim Palace is an example of this style. The third era was a Greek revival. Two excellent local examples of this style are Stratton Park and Northington Grange (pictured). Stratton Park was remodelled into the Greek style by George Dance for Frederick Baring between 1803 and 1806. Sadly only the portico remains today. Northington Grange was remodelled by William Wilkins for Henry Drummond from 1804 onwards. A visitor in 1823 commented; 'there is nothing like it on this side of arcadia.' After Capability Brown died Humphrey Repton became a popular landscape designer and unlike Brown, his designed varied from property to property. At Stratton Park he moved a village and a turnpike road that he felt were too close to the house. If you are interested in Nicola's work she has a blog at <http://musingsonthe18th.blogspot.com/2011/02/eighteenth-century-country-houses.html>

Kings Worthy Parish Council - Past and Present

Colin Arnett, the clerk to Kings Worthy Parish Council, gave a talk to the History Group on Thursday 10 February 2012 on 'Kings Worthy Parish Council - Past and Present.' He detailed the area administered by the Council which includes Abbots Worthy which is now part of the South Downs National Park. Parish Councils are the lower tier of government, being responsible for local amenities. They are not associated with Church parishes and are non-party political. He compared the population size of the parish with the census figures from 1891 to today. Although the population had multiplied by a factor of 9 the numbers of occupants per household had fallen from 5 to 2.5. The first meeting of the Parish Council was held on the 19 April 1894 in the School Room. Lord Eversley became chairman in 1907 and gave a legacy for the purchase of the Recreation Ground. Colin shared with members his research from the minute books held at the HCC Records Office. It was interesting to note that history repeats itself with many similar issues replicating themselves. Amongst these was that the Parish Council were one of the first to adopt the Baths & Wash House Act in 1907 in providing facilities for bathers. Other topics included the grassing of cattle, street lighting, speeding traffic, and railways. Comparisons with the income and expenditure showed that the income from WCC was some £40 compared with almost £112,000 today. He then outlined the structure of the present Council with its offices based at the Kings Worthy Community Centre and the facilities that it maintains for parishioners ranging from playground equipment to the Burial Ground. Councillors are volunteers receiving no payment for their time and serve for a period of 4 years. They place a high priority on public consultation and are always keen to receive the views of parishioners. Communication is through the Parish Council's award winning website, newsletters and monthly bulletins.

The River Itchen From Source To Sea

On 8th March Jill Daniels gave a talk about places of interest along the River Itchen. From its source near Cheriton to the end at Southampton Water the length is 30 miles. Cheriton, as well as being the source of the river, was also of the location of the Battle of Cheriton during the Civil War when the Royalist army were defeated in one day. Re-enactments of the battle are performed by the Sealed Knot group. The next stop along the river was Tichborne where the villagers receive a dole every Lady Day thanks to the efforts of Lady Mabella Tichborne, Lady of the Manor during Henry II's reign. The next stops on the tour were Old and New Alresford. Jill spoke of their connections with Mary Sumner the founder of the Mother's Union, Admiral Lord Romney, watercress and a navigation system developed by the Bishop of Winchester. Along the river in Itchen Abbas, Charles Kingsley was inspired to write his novel *The Water Babies* and at Avington Park, Charles II found a useful place to stay with his mistress while visiting Winchester. The owner of the house, George Brydges, was more tolerant of the king's affairs than the Dean of Winchester Cathedral. At Winchester the river flows under St Swithun's bridge on Bridge Street. Before the bridge was built visitors to Winchester had to paddle across into the city centre. One day Swithun saw a woman's eggs drop and smash as she crossed the river. He miraculously restored the eggs and later a bridge was built and named after him. Further along are Blackbridge Wharf where the Itchen Navigation begins, Jane Austen's house and the water meadows which inspired Keats to write his poem, *Ode to Autumn*. The river then flows past the almshouse at St Cross, Shawford, Twyford and onto to Brambridge. Brambridge House was the home of the Smythe family whose daughter, Maria Fitzherbert, became the wife of George IV when he was Prince Regent. Owing to the fact that she was a Catholic and a commoner the marriage was never recognised. At Allbrook is a Grade 2 listed Tudor farmhouse which is the former home of the painter Mary Beale. Sadly the house is almost derelict today. At West End is the paper mill where the Huguenot Henry Argana Portel was apprenticed. He went on to found his own company and from 1724 it made banknote paper for the Bank of England. Moving along the river there is Mansbridge where the Itchen Navigation begins, Peartree Church and the Vickers Submarine works which made spitfires. The final image of the talk was Lowry's painting of the Itchen Floating Bridge. Lowry painted this when staying with friends in Woolston.

The Royal Chelsea Hospital



On 12 April Karen Smith, former Matron of the Royal Hospital Chelsea, gave a talk on the history of the institution and an insight into what life is like for the pensioners and staff living there. The history of the institution started with Charles II, a compassionate man who wanted to ensure that the soldiers who had been on both sides of the Civil War would be looked after. The Parliament were not keen to provide money for such a project but luckily the Royal Society were more forward thinking and wished to improve things. The 60 acre site was purchased in 1668 and the buildings, designed by Christopher Wren, were completed in 1689. Levies were raised and donations made to fund the building. Charles II had died before it was completed but James II and Mary were also keen supporters of the project. The first pensioners were in residence in February 1692 and by the end of that year the capacity of 476 was reached. In 1809 a new Infirmary was built to house 45 pensioners. It was built with yellow brick to contrast the red bricks used by Wren. This Infirmary was bombed during the Blitz in 1941. Bombing also damaged the hospital in 1918. This was rebuilt and then completely destroyed by a V2 rocket in 1945. Each pensioner has his or her own berth which measures 9ftx9ft. These were smaller when first built but were expanded in the twentieth century. The berths contain their bed and belongings, they hang their clothes outside in the hall. The pensioners attend Chapel twice a day and eat in the Great Hall. There are allotments available or jobs in the stores and the library. There is a GP practice on site and although pensioners go off site for operations they come back to the infirmary to recuperate. Prospective pensioners stay for 4 days to see if they move to move in permanently. The criteria for admittance is service in the British Army, being 65 years old or more and being in receipt of an army pension. Karen's talk was beautifully illustrated by paintings, plans and photographs of the Royal Hospital and pensioners past and present.

Visit to Butser Ancient Farm

On Saturday 4th August members of the Worthys Local History Group visited Butser Ancient Farm where they were given a guided tour by Fergus Milton. Fergus had given a talk to the group about the Butser project in November and this was a great chance to see the work he had described in action. The main part of the villages contains several roundhouse structures typical of the Iron Age period and during the visit the group were able to watch and participate in demonstrations taking place. Eleanor Hamblin and Diana Bonsey cooked breadsticks over a fire and bystanders were treated to warm bread covered in local honey. Mary Morshead, Jean Merrikin and Charlotte Brockway gave bellowing a try during a smelting demonstration. Crushed copper ore was placed in a bowl and a furnace was built up with charcoal. The long business of bellowing to reach a temperature necessary to turn the ore into copper began. Finally green flames appeared which indicates that the process is complete and the group were able to see the resultant copper. Just outside the main village stands a roman villa complete with underfloor heating and mosaics. This was of particular interest to the group because the villa is based on one excavated by David Johnston in Sparsholt in the late 1960s/early 1970s. A cooking demonstration showed the group Roman cooking techniques and the ingredients they used. Outside the group were shown the crops grown at Butser including various types of wheat and flax. It was an interesting and informative day and the group were grateful to Fergus for taking the time to show us around.