Good news for the Canalside Garden

Forthcoming events

Tuesday, 24th November 2015, 7.30 pm. ‘George Eliot and her Local connections,’ by John Burton, Trinity Church, Coleshill Road.

Thursday, 21st January 2016, Festive Meal, at the Unicorn, Orton-on-the-Hill. Details from Pauline. Email carlandpauline@talk21.com. Tel.: 01827 713976

A full programme for 2016 will be sent out soon.

Subscriptions by standing order

As you will know, with no-one to take her place, our membership secretary, Cathy Charles-Jones’s retirement has forced us to look at simplifying the way we handle subscriptions. As a result we are now asking all new members to complete a standing order form on joining. This will remove the need to chase overdue subscriptions and the handling of cash and cheques and will make life much easier for our treasurer, John Connell, who despite having moved to live at Market Bosworth, very kindly continues in this role. We regret the need to do this but other societies are moving in this direction and, already, the greater proportion of our membership pays by standing order. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Cathy for her long service to the society, which she was instrumental in setting up. Like John, she has continued in her role despite moving away, in her case, to Nottinghamshire.

Value for money?

We regretted the need to increase subscriptions, but speakers and events are becoming more expensive, and we do not want to compromise on our standards. We aim to bring you the best speakers and most interesting events, and they do not come cheap! We have resisted the idea of admission charges. But to give you an example, the recent tour of Tamworth cost us £80 but was free to members. We had two hours of expert guided walking and we do not want to compromise on our standards. We regretted the need to increase subscriptions, but other societies are increasing their fees to meet the cost of running events.

Atherstone Civic Society was formed in 1990 to stimulate interest in, and action for, the improvement of the local environment.

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Welcome to our Autumn Newsletter.

We are pleased to report that Margaret Hughes is now at home convalescing following her operation at Papworth Hospital. Meanwhile, Judy continues as temporary editor. The Society has had a good season for events, thanks to the social committee, Pauline Gurney, Rita Poulson, Margaret Bell and Jenny Quay. It is also good to have recently-co-opted committee member, Patrick Woodcock on our planning team, adding to existing members, Roy Taylor and Judy Vero.

Summer 2015

Summer began in June with a guided tour of Donnington le Heath Manor House, by Eddie Smallwood. This is a rare once-occupied upper hall house of c.1280 (below), now re-

stored by Leicestershire County Council, with a period garden, lovingly maintained by volunteers. Afterwards we enjoyed a buffet supper.

The Garden Party in July was held in the gardens of Oldbury Hall, by kind invitation of the Morris family who looked after us very well and gave us a talk on the history of Oldbury Hall which was pulled down around 1948. It was fascinating to be able to see the inside of the intriguing little tower which can be seen from the Hartshill Hayes Country Park. It turns out to have been a gardener’s bothy and apple store.

In August we returned to Bletchley Park, five years after our previous visit (report on p.2). September’s visit to Tamworth was a revelation to some of us who had never seen the town’s historic quarter. Our guide, Caroline Proud, showed us buildings which had escaped the 60s bulldozers, especially the old town hall with its statue of Robert Peel (below). We also learned that it had been funded by Thomas Guy of Guy’s Hospital fame, who later had a row with the town and banned locals from his almshouses, built in 1707 and still standing. Another visit is planned for 2016 to explore the interior of St Editha’s Church.

We had a last minute change of speaker for October, as Tony Wallis of Hinckley Archaeological Society stepped in for Philip Wells who was ill. He spoke about Hinckley Priory, which existed until 1414. Its property was transferred to Mount Grace Priory in north Yorkshire, who also owned the Manor of Atherstone from 1463 until 1538 when it was dissolved by Henry VIII.

We are very grateful to Tony for stepping in at very short notice. (Father Philip’s talk, ‘Polesworth’s Literary Connections’ has been re-scheduled for Tuesday, 16th February 2016.)
Visit to Bletchley Park

In August, we revisited Bletchley Park, known as ‘Station X’ during WW2. It was a top secret establishment where intercepted German messages in code were deciphered by a team of clever mathematicians. A new exhibition at Bletchley has many examples of the equipment used, including the variants of the ‘Enigma’ coding machine with ‘how they worked’ examples displayed. A notable person in breaking the codes was Alan Turing. He designed a machine named ‘The Bombe’ to beat ‘The Enigma’ and go through the millions of permutations of the letter settings. Even then, it was not that simple, the code breakers had to ‘best guess’ what the message could be to give the machine a clue and the German codes were changed daily. The codebreakers were highly intelligent, though many were odd and eccentric. One notably drank his coffee outdoors and then threw his cup into the lake.

Boudica Revisited

With the Roman Mancetter project of 2013/2014 still vi-brant, two recent media items have brought fresh interest to the matter of Boudica’s campaign. An article in Current Archaeology (No. 308) opens with: “GOLD! Today I had the good fortune to uncover a collection of gold and silver jewellery.” To his obvious delight, archaeologist Adam Wightman unearthed a board of treasures during the remo-ving of a Colchester department store, personal items ap-parently buried in panic-driven haste ahead of the Boudican onslaught in AD60. In the remains of a wooden, silver-sheeted box he found valuables: a silver bracelet, a mili-tary-awarded armlet, two gold bracelets, two pairs of gold earrings, five gold rings (all but one set with emeralds) and a bag of coins worth about five weeks’ pay for a legionsary. But it also contained sentimental keepsakes: a glass disc carved with a panther, dating to long before the attack on the city (perhaps a family heirloom?) and a protective bulla - an amulet of the type given to boys under 16, after which it would be treasured, and brought out to wear on special occasions. Those who could afford gave their sons gold; this bulla is copper-alloy.

The article caught my attention for two reasons. First, the author suggests that Boudica’s rebellion should be re-named a War of Independence; the tag of ‘rebellion’ represents the Roman viewpoint. Second, his account of this war is ac-companied by six maps, the sixth of which begs the big question. A crossed-swords battle-sign marks an unpe-tty area some fifty or sixty miles north of St Albans as be-ing the site where the Romans “carefully chose a battle site”. So, exactly where? The question the ACS project sought to answer remains unresolved. More to be done?

Obituaries

We are saddened to report the deaths of three of our long-standing members, all of whom made a signifi-cant contribution to the Society. Mike Trye was a key member of the HART project. As a member of the buildings survey team his work can be seen in our book, ‘A charming Place to Live’. Sue Naylor was a former committee member and tireless campaigner on Green issues, and Betty Ste-venson a staunch supporter over many years. Al-though not a member of the Society, we also miss Tony Wright, former keeper of town councilor, who worked so hard for the town and the canal, and died tragically young.

John and Jo Connell, and Howard Veron in site in 2011

It happens that the Colchester board is recognised in the second media item, (“...what we’re witnessing is a moment of sheer terror!”). This is a three-part BBC programme pre-sented by Neil Oliver and Alice Roberts: ‘The Celts: Blood, Iron and Sacrifice’. The third part, on October 19th, focused on the story of Boudica, so again that same outstanding battle-site question had to be addressed. There was suspense as to its choice, until, late in the programme, it most hearten-ingly came out in support of Mancetter: “a favoured loca-tion”. However, that good news also brought some frus-tration. We were shown a wood, then a meadow with trees on three sides, but not a single place-name was mentioned; no field name, no wood, no known path, no bridge.

At the time of writing, efforts are being made to contact the programme-makers for more information. It would seem that the programme was made without contacting Warwickshire Archaeology or Warwick Museum. So, can any reader throw light on the specifics of the locations shown? That would be most helpful.

Planning Matters - Our countryside disappears

Hot on the heels of the biomass plant on the old shale heap, Jaguar Landrover are developing a major vehi-cle distribution centre on the old Buddles Colliery site which will operate 24/7 generating more HGVs on Merevale Lane and depriving local people of peace and quiet to enjoy a country walk, even at weekends.

Across Merevale Lane just below 21 Oaks a five hect-a-re solar farm has been given permission, despite our plea that it was too close to the historic sites and would impact on the views from 21 Oaks across to Leicestershire. We have been assured that it will only be visible from the upper floor of Bentley House and Merevale Hall, though it will be “glimpsed” from the road in winter. It is undeniable that one of the Borth-ough’s most treasured views has now been damaged. There was very little local opposition, probably be-cause the developers are offering local cash benefits.

Atherstone Civic Society has not objected to the fourth major development which is destined to de-plete us of a huge swath of countryside between Holly Lane and Whittington. We appreciate that people need homes and that we have had very few family houses built in recent years. Therefore, when the planning consultation came out last year our re-sponses were restricted to the importance of achieving the restoration of the neglected buildings in Whittington. Apart from a couple of agricultural dwellings this small estate hamlet has remained undeveloped and its repair and enhancement would be a reasonable quid-pro-quo for the loss of the countryside. The Merevale Estate will do very well from these four major devel-opments and it is only fair that some benefit to the wider community should accrue.

‘NO’ to chicken broiler plant

The people of Mancetter are campaigning hard against a 40,000 chicken broiler plant close to homes on Nuneaton Road. The Environment Agency is propos-ing to allow the contractor a licence, so we are depend-ing on NWBC to refuse planning permission. With help from committee member, Roy Taylor, who was a local authority officer with a long experience of pollu-tion issues, we wrote strong representations to NWBC and the EA.

Former Daw Mill Colliery, Over Whitacre

Plans by Harwood Estates for an industrial develop-ment have been rejected by NWBC. The site is in the Green Belt and no ‘very special circumstances’ have been proven for its development. The borough coun-cil is insisting that Warwickshire County Council must now enfore the restoration agreement so that the site can be returned to countryside.