

**The Elmbridge Hundred
Talk by Alistair Grant
Tuesday 15 February – 8 pm
Parish Room – St Paul's Church
Palace Road, East Molesey**

Many famous (and a few infamous!) figures are associated with the historic borough of Elmbridge. Many of their life stories are now forgotten and in danger of disappearing. The aim of the *The Elmbridge Hundred* project has been to research, document, and celebrate this rich human heritage.

The community partnership of heritage organisations has worked with sixth form students from local schools to research and write the biographies of 600 historic individuals who have a strong connection with the borough of Elmbridge. These biographies will be recorded on the Elmbridge Hundred website to develop a lasting community resource.

Alistair Grant conceived and researched the project to celebrate the centenary of Elmbridge Museum, and will also create a large public artwork called *The Elmbridge Hundred*. To be installed in summer 2011, this will comprise 100 poetic plaques at historic sites, linked by a heritage trail and audioguide around the borough.

AGM

Thursday 7 April – 8 pm

**'We are Fred Karno's Army' - an illustrated talk by
Ron Smedley on the rise and fall of Fred Karno,
1866 - 1941**

St Lawrence School, Church Road, East Molesey

The business of the AGM should take no longer than 30 minutes and it will be followed by a talk by Ron Smedley, about Fred Karno, the most famous resident of Taggs Island.

A music-hall impresario in the 1890s, he worked with Charlie Chaplin and Stan Laurel and was renowned for shambolic comedy sketches, to the extent that Lord Kitchener's hastily trained recruits later became known as 'Fred Karno's Army'. He later built the Karsino on Taggs Island and was the owner of the Astoria houseboat, which can still be seen moored at Hampton.

MEETING REPORTS

**Water, Water Everywhere
Report by Carole Needham**

Our September event was a talk by Ray Brodie entitled "Water, Water Everywhere" about the Longford River and the waterways in Bushy Park. Ray is currently the Park Manager and has considerable experience and a great fund of knowledge having been "on the job" in Bushy and other Royal Parks for 30 years. With the aid of a projector and some stunning photographs, Ray gave us a captivating talk, with a potted history of the Longford River, which flows past Heathrow and feeds the park and the waterways in the park itself.

We were treated to a brief glimpse of the park's history and Ray touched on such diverse topics as the restoration of the 18th Century Water Gardens near the Hampton Hill Gate, the recent work on the Diana Fountain, control of the water levels within the park via a sluice gate at the entrance of the Longford River and plans for future restorations.

Ray was full of facts. Did you know that the Heron Pond and Leg of Mutton Pond were created by Oliver Cromwell, so that he could indulge his passion for fishing? Ray's enthusiasm showed through the depth of knowledge that he displayed throughout the talk.

Afterwards there was an opportunity to ask questions, which produced a lively exchange, and even touched on the thorny problem of car parking charges. The evening ended with Ray being presented with a bottle of "something" to very well deserved applause.

**A Walk round Walton-on-Thames
Guided Walk led by Bryan Ellis
Report by Jenny Wood**

Bryan Ellis led 17 members on a very interesting and entertaining walk round the centre of Walton. The October weather was rather damp and dreary and may have deterred some members from attending but all those who braved the elements had a most enjoyable afternoon.

Bryan is the author of 'Walton Past' and is extremely knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the history of Walton. He guided us from River House Gardens, along the towpath past the Old Manor House of Walton Leigh, which is thought to date from about 1320. Along the way he told us about the history of the river at Walton, including the story, which Bryan does not believe, that Julius Caesar forded the Thames at Walton. He mentioned the succession of bridges that have been built - from the first, a timber structure built in the mid 18th century. This was the subject of a painting by Canaletto and only lasted about 30 years. The fifth and most recent, which was erected in 1999, was stated to be safe for traffic for 10 years!

When we reached the crossroads in the centre of the town Bryan talked about Walton Film Studios, which occupied the land on the Hepworth Way side of the crossroads for about 50 years from 1899. The studios were originally established by Cecil Hepworth, but when Hepworth became bankrupt in the 1920s they were bought by Archibald Nettlefold and renamed Nettlefold Studios. In the 1950s they were taken over by Sapphire Films and became known as Walton Studios. They were one of the principal centres of film-making in Britain, making films and television series including 'The Adventures of Robin Hood' starring Richard Greene. The studios were eventually forced to close in 1961 by competition from Shepperton Studios, which were more modern.

We then walked to St Mary's Church, through the churchyard to Churchfield Road and along the High Street to Elmgrove. Elmgrove was tenanted by Lord Louis Battenberg and his wife, Victoria of Hesse, during the 1890s. One of their guests during this time was the future Tsar Nicholas II who described Elmgrove as a "cosy cottage". Elmgrove later became a magistrates' court and in 1969 a case against George Harrison for possessing cannabis was heard there.

Bryan talked about the connection between Walton and New Zealand. During the First World War there was a New Zealand military hospital at Mount Felix and the public house on the corner of New Zealand Avenue and High Street was previously known as 'The Kiwi'. There are several graves of New Zealanders in St Mary's churchyard and the New Zealand flag is still flown at the church every year on Anzac Day.

Bryan has offered to repeat the walk for us and we hope to be able to agree a date for another walk in 2011 or 2012. If you do get a chance to go on the walk I would definitely recommend doing so. I thoroughly enjoyed it and learnt lots of things which I did not know about Walton.

Life in Molesey during WW2 Report by Elizabeth Cooper

It was a 'V for Victory' evening at Mole Hall in November when an audience of almost 200 people experienced a vivid recreation of everyday life in Wartime Molesey.

The scene was set with a montage of photographs and memorabilia displayed around the hall, illustrating such diverse topics as the Home Guard and the story of evacuees.

We then enjoyed a talk by Anthony Barnes about everyday life in Molesey during WW2, which he illustrated with photographs and film. Initially he was concerned with the grimmer side of life. He related stories about the bombs which landed on Pemberton Road and Avern Road, as well as the V1 Flying Bomb which hit Imber Court in June 1944 whilst the Welsh Guards were holding a Sports Day. On this occasion 18 Guards were killed, as were a number of civilians. Nevertheless, Anthony said, people were still determined to appreciate a lighter side of life. The Government urged people to enjoy 'holidays at home' and we were shown film of crowds at leisure by the river at Hampton Court

Of course, 1945 saw great celebrations as huge Victory street parties were organised around the town.

A quartet of Barn Theatre actors then took the stage, bringing to life powerful reminiscences taken from interviews with people living in Molesey during wartime. One account told of schoolchildren watching a dogfight overhead whilst bullets hit the playground!

To round off the evening, members of the audience were invited to their own Victory party and enjoyed delicious cakes cooked from wartime recipes by members of Molesey Women's Institute. Many stayed to have a closer look at the displays around the room, and to read Cynthia Chandler's heart-warming Wartime Diaries written whilst a teenager living with her parents in Vine Road.

Magical Molesey

Tudor & Co Estate Agents once again kindly hosted a MLHS display as part of the Magical Molesey Christmas celebrations. Following on our Wartime meeting, we showed photographs of the many Victory parties that were held at the end of war, together with a presentation about the 'Smith Gun'. This weapon was invented by Major William Smith, Director of the Trianco Company of Imber Court. A cumbersome contraption, it was issued to the Home Guard, and featured in an episode of 'Dad's Army'.

Carnival Meeting – November 2011

This year our major piece of research will be focussing on the Molesey Carnival through the years. This will culminate in an evening event in November. We would especially like to hear from anyone who has memories, photographs or other memorabilia of the carnival. In particular we would like to hear from anyone who has any information about carnivals in the past. Also, we are actively seeking members who would like to help out with research about the carnival. If you would like to be involved in any way please contact Pauline Sieler on 020 8979 7556.

Summer Stroll – Follow-up

During his talk following the Summer Stroll, Tony Osborne highlighted two questions:

- Where was the precise location of Molesey Prior manor house?
- How did Keen's Alley get its name?

Rosemary Searle told us the following:

'During the late '60s, the then vicar of St. Mary's, Rev. Ted Allen, held a series of local history lectures which I attended with my great uncle. It was in the days before all original parish documents had to be handed over to local authorities and we were fortunate enough to be able to see them in their unique setting of the 'Parish Chest'.

The vicar told us that Molesey Prior Manor House was situated on the north side of Candle Lane (Walton Road) between Manor Road and School Road. It later became a farmhouse and I believe that the carpet warehouse in Manor Road could be one of the original farm buildings.

Rowland Baker talks about it too. 'Each manor, of course, had a principal house in which the lord lived. That for the manor of Molesey Prior was situated just off Walton Road, where School Road is now. When the manor was in joint ownership with Molesey Matham, it became a farmhouse but, by the middle of the last century, it had degenerated into three very poor tenements. In 1873 it was in such an insanitary state that the medical officer of health reported that 13 persons slept in two rooms, each 13ft by 9ft by 6ft. The house was also totally unfit for habitation — there was no water supply, no water closet accommodation, and near to the house was a pond of filthy and offensive water into which vegetable matter and refuse were thrown. The report continues with a statement, which is perhaps the most puzzling to modern ears: 'The only redeeming part about the house is that it has no windows'. It was swept away a few months later.'

KEEN'S ALLEY

A public right of way connecting Vine Road and Bridge Road. Originally called Cummings or Comeyns Walk, probably a corruption of commons walk, i.e. the walk across the common. Benjamin Keen, a cowkeeper, kept a small farm at the Bridge Road end at the turn of the century. (Rowland Baker)

Website

The Society's Website now features a section called "Online Collection" which is intended to provide access to material that the Society wishes to both archive and make generally available to interested parties. Initially the material included will mainly comprise transcriptions of talks given by or copies of papers and articles written by members of the Society. In time it is hoped to be able to widen the scope to include other material such as photographs, digital sound recordings, maps and other documents.

The first items to be published are transcriptions of the talks given by Dr Kenneth Brown in March 2008 on the subject of 'The History of Cottage Hospitals in Molesey' and 'The NHS in Molesey in the 1960s'. If you would like to read these transcriptions you can now do so at www.moleseyhistorysociety.org.

Wartime Diaries and Memories of a Surrey Schoolgirl

As you may know, one of our members, Cynthia Chandler, was born in East Molesey in 1924. 70 years ago, during the winter of 1940/41, London and the South East was still experiencing the horrors of the Blitz. Cynthia and her family were resident in Vine Road at the time and spending the nights sheltering in the cellars of St. Barnabas' Church Presbytery, at the kind invitation of Revd. Edward Rodley.

During the first two years of WW11, Cynthia kept a diary and her daughter, Rosemary Searle, has prepared extracts and photographs and had them printed, in order to place on record some personal memories of family life in Molesey at this difficult time.

Cynthia's "Wartime Diaries and Memories of a Surrey Schoolgirl", were first made available at our Life in Molesey during WW2' evening in November and if anyone would like a copy, a few are still available. Please e-mail rosemary@searle38.freemove.co.uk or else telephone on 020 8979 3934.

Exhibitions at Elmbridge Museum
Accessorise: A Story of Superficial Splendour

A new exhibition of fabulous frippery will open on 5 February at Elmbridge Museum and will run until 8 June 2011. You are invited to come into the Museum's closet and be seduced by the exquisite costume collection on display. See all manner of accessories – shoes, fans, hats, gloves, purses, watches, jewellery and parasols. Discover some of the embellishments fashionable men and women have prized across the centuries, and how styles have changed.

Amongst the Museum treasures, you will find a Roman brooch, a princess' slipper, a gold mourning ring, Edwardian evening shoes and a veritable clutch of handbags.

If you thought that accessories were simply frivolous and fun, then think again. 'Accessorise' reveals how these small possessions tell significant stories about society: shifting gender roles, social moves, conspicuous consumption, materials and manufacture. You really can read history in a handbag!

Devotion – Belief in a Changing Borough

Elmbridge Museum presents a new exhibition charting Elmbridge's dramatic religious past and its increasingly diverse and harmonious present. Witness the impact of the Reformation, radical Diggers and religious tensions in the area. Then see how Judaism, Buddhism and a host of other faiths now flourish in the Borough.

Elmbridge Museum, Church Street, Weybridge

Surrey History Centre
Surrey Museums Monthy – A History of Surrey in 50 Objects

Taking inspiration from the hugely successful British Museum and BBC project A History of the World in 100 Objects, this April's Surrey Museums Month will focus on objects around the county that have played an important role in shaping Surrey's fascinating history. Through these it is hoped to share key moments, discoveries, people, trades, arts and crafts that have influenced the people and places of Surrey, and many further afield. Keep watch for developments on <http://www.exploringsurreyspast.org.uk> from mid-February, building up to a whole month of activities, exhibitions and events throughout April.

Surrey History Centre, 130 Goldsworth Road, Woking, GU21 6ND

Family History on the Internet Workshop – Walton Library – Tuesday 29 March

This workshop is for newcomers to family history research who have not yet used the internet for online resources. The workshop will introduce you to some useful websites to assist your research as well as look at online catalogues, the Surrey History Centre Collections catalogue, census data and military records. Non-library members are most welcome but **basic keyboard and mouse skills are needed**.

Duration: 1½ hours – 10:30am until 12 noon. **Ticket price £5**. Advance booking is essential, either by phone on 0300 200 1001 or by visiting the library.

The Spike Heritage Centre
Warren Road, Guildford. GU1 3JH
General Tours, Costumed Living History And Educational Visits

Take a tour of the original Casual Ward, on the site of the former Guildford Workhouse. Built in 1906, it housed the most desperate members of Edwardian society: tramps and vagrants. The Spike has been sympathetically restored and now offers a chilling opportunity to explore the lives of the inmates and experience the dark history of one of the few remaining buildings with examples of stone breaking cells, where the tramps worked to earn their keep. Experience a living history of sights, sounds and smells.

For small groups (less than 10) and individuals the Spike is open for guided tours on Tuesdays and Saturdays from 10:00am - 16:00pm. Price: £3.50 for Adults, £2.50 for children (aged 5-16) and concessions. Larger groups are welcome at other times by arrangement at a cost of £4.00 including tea and coffee. Evening tours for groups are recommended. Costume re enactments are also available by arrangement at a cost of £5.00 including refreshments.

To book : Tel : Zoe Nash-Williams on 01483 569944 Email : heritage@charlotteville.co.uk

Who do You Think You Are?

The 'Who Do You Think You Are?' Live Show takes place at Olympia on February 25-27. The show features celebrities who have taken part in the show, such as Monty Don, and workshops on a host of family history topics and details can be found online at whodoyouthinkyouarelive.co.uk, or by telephone on 0844 873 7330.