

**The Elmbridge Hundred
Alistair Grant
Meeting Report by Mollie Kingham**

The Parish Room at St Paul's Church was absolutely full one evening in February for a talk on the Elmbridge Hundred by Alistair Grant who is an artist, writer and historian..

This community project, initiated by Alistair, to celebrate the centenary of the Elmbridge Museum, was designed to research, document and celebrate some of the remarkable and diverse people associated with Elmbridge. Although the borough only came into existence in 1974 with the re-organisation of local government, it maps almost perfectly the Saxon hundred of *Amelebrige* mentioned in the Domesday Book. Many of the Local History Societies, Museums and Senior Schools have been involved in suggesting people and carrying out research into their lives.

From the long list of over 600 entries, a panel of 'experts' arrived at the Top 100. There were a few ground rules, the most significant, apart from being considered famous, was that the person nominated had to be dead. So no Cliff Richard or Chelsea footballers.

Having finally selected the 100 people, they were researched and documented. Alistair is writing a poetic biography about each person, and these poems are being photo-chemically etched onto plaques of mirror steel. The idea is that the mirrored surface of the plaque will reflect the surrounding landscape, together with the readers themselves as they reflect on past lives. He brought along a sample: it was stunning. During the summer of 2011 the plaques will be installed around the borough at the location most associated with that person.

So what kind of people are amongst our illustrious former residents? Royalty and not a few of their mistresses, artists and engineers, poets and musicians. There are 33 women in the list, some in their own right but others appear for their association. And who are they? Visit www.elmbridgehundred.org.uk/ to see the long list, with the Top 100 starred.

Not surprisingly, Alistair chose the illustrious Henry VIII, who acquired Oatlands Manor in 1537 to open his talk. There then followed a "Magnificence of Mistresses": from Frances Day of Wayneflete Tower in Esher, one of Edward VII's mistresses who, as well as having affairs with a number of other royals, also "courted" Tallulah Bankhead and Marlene Dietrich, to Mary the wife of the poet George Meredith, who lived in Weybridge.

Continuing with the twentieth century, we heard about Barnes Wallis, of bouncing bomb fame, Royston Pike after whom the local lecture series is named, the ballerina Anna Pavlova who danced and dined at Esher Place, concluding with George Harrison and John Lennon.



**Sir Henry Thompson, portrait by John
Everett Millais**

Amongst the real "locals" was Sir Henry Thompson who lived at Hurstside House in West Molesey (now Wilton Gardens) from 1880. He founded the Cremation Society and became its president. He also helped to found the crematorium at Woking, the first in the country, which opened in 1885.