

Meeting Reports

Liquid history: houseboat life and the Elmbridge riverside trail Summer Stroll - 4 July 2013

Report by Anthony Barnes

Imagine living on a houseboat on Ash Island and having a lie-in every morning. You run to work and get there in 15 minutes! On the way up in the lift, you strip off so you can rush out and get straight into your Tudor knight's costume. You then enjoy the rest of the day entertaining the Hampton Court crowds! That was Toby Butler's description of his idyllic life as a young graduate living on the Thames in a fibre-glass ex-hire boat from the Norfolk Broads. He loved it so much, he even got married on board and, as a historian fascinated by spoken memories, recorded his guests talking about it.

That was just one of the amusing stories with which Toby Butler entertained and charmed over 90 of us at this year's summer stroll. Before we set off on the walk, Toby told us about life on houseboats on the Thames. He played recordings of people from the 1940s and 1950s speaking about how hard life was for them, especially if they were part of a large family, living and working on narrow boats. He compared the narrow boats with the converted ex-hire boats and the 'big boxes' that enable those who live in them today to have all the comforts of a house on land. He wondered if a revival of houseboat living might provide a solution for single people, young professionals, retirees and divorcees!

After his talk at the Cricket Club, we walked to Cigarette Island where the Elmbridge riverside audio trail starts and then along the Thames towpath to the Hurst Park Heritage Marker. Toby created this audio trail himself for Elmbridge Borough Council in 2008 so that anyone walking along the towpath can listen to stories about the people and events that we associate with this stretch of the river. If you missed the walk, you can listen to this audio trail on your mobile phone (there are six marker posts starting at Cigarette Island) or by transferring it onto an MP3 player from www.memoryscape.org.uk/liquidhistory.

After leaving Hampton Court, Toby went to work at the London Museum. Here, he first became interested in recording the voices of people whose stories could form a living 'memoryscape' long after the landscape where they used to live had changed completely. As an experiment, he made a floating buoy out of the flotsam and jetsam that used to bang against his boat and wake him up at night; and then he followed the buoy in a boat and wherever it made contact with anyone or anything between Ash Island and Hammersmith, he recorded the story. The oddity of the mission led to some tricky encounters with the police and the Port of London harbour authority, but Toby had discovered a grand passion - designing 'audio walks' to record hidden histories before they are irrevocably lost. Toby continues to pursue this interest today at the University of East London and Birkbeck, University of London, where he teaches.

History of Frederick Paine, Undertakers Talk by Ian Smith

Tuesday 17 September 2013

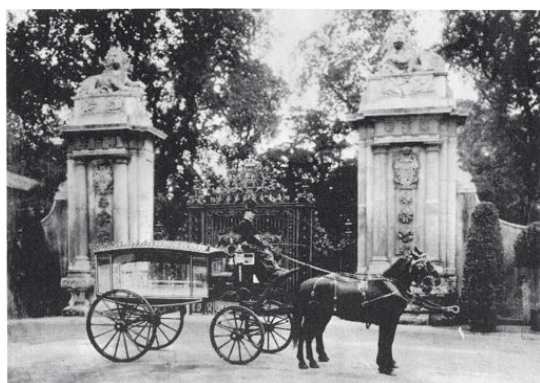
Report by Brian Smith

Benjamin Franklin famously commented, 'in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes'. Modern finance barons may have defied the tax element of this well-known proverb, but death comes to everyone. This is what came to mind as Ian Smith gave a fascinating and informative talk about the history of one of our well-known local funeral directors, Frederick W Paine. Ian is the curator of their museum in Old London Road Kingston.

Up to the middle of the nineteenth century anyone able to dig a deep hole and with the carpentry skills to make a rough coffin could 'undertake' to bury the dead. However, with the rapid growth of population in London and the cholera epidemics of the 1850's, the government put the onus on local government to provide burial grounds. Fred Paine, who was born in 1870 into a family of cabinet makers, watch repairers, estate agents and undertakers, saw the opportunity of expanding the undertaking part of the family business and opened his first funeral business from small premises in New Malden.

An established firm, Farebrother, had its nose put out of joint by this and opened a competing funeral parlour nearby. Competition between the two firms went on for a number of years. In 1908 Frederick W Paine opened at 24 London Road Kingston (Farebrother was already across the road at No 21!!).

Fred Paine proved to be an imaginative entrepreneur. He had black 'Friesian' horses to pull the hearse or 'glass' as it is known. In 1913 he bought the first motor hearse in the district. After the 1914-18 conflict, he expanded outlets in the South Western suburbs of London until, at his death in 1945, he had the largest network of branches of any funeral directing business in the country.



A horse-drawn hearse posing against the splendid backdrop of the Lion Gate outside Hampton Court Palace

Fred was the eldest of 12 children and his sister Ida took over the company. Ida had always wanted to be a funeral director, but her brother refused saying it was 'a man's job'. In 1946 the company was sold off to the London Necropolis Company, which owned Brookwood Cemetery near Woking and which was itself bought up by a series of property companies. Frederick W Paine has however retained its name and distinctive sign to this day.

The company, under Fred, handled all aspects of the business from embalming and laying out of the body to masonry and memorials. Coffin making was, of course, central and three main woods were used – oak, ash and elm (or 'elum' for those amongst us who remember Bernard Miles' monologues). Mahogany was a longer lasting wood but was more expensive. Wood was often stored in the gardens of houses that Fred had bought. He was also an enthusiastic freemason, being a member of several lodges. This membership of course gave him a great deal of influence in the locality.

There were many questions after the talk and Ian described how a Victorian funeral director would have worked. Probably the most significant difference from today was the laying out of the body of the deceased in the family home. The local 'midwife' would often be the 'laying out lady' who would wash and dress the body, so that people could come and pay their last respects. This was often in the front room on the dining or even kitchen table: probably not the best approach in warm weather! Manoeuvring the coffin between rooms might entail removing windows which, according to the speaker, was quite a straightforward job. A black sign would be hung on the front door so that people would know that this was a grieving family.

The audience showed considerable interest in the Brookwood Necropolis, which was established for burial of bodies that could no longer be accommodated in the overcrowded cemeteries of London. It was consecrated in 1854 and was served by a special train running from Waterloo down to Brookwood near Woking. The train would stop at various stations, including Surbiton, where local coffins were loaded. When it started there were three levels of ticket 1st, 2nd and 3rd class and the coffins had the same hierarchical status. One-way tickets were available for obvious reasons. The service ran until 1941 when the Waterloo platform was destroyed by bombing. (In Harry Potter terms it was presumably Platform -1).

Ian had brought along literature about the museum and also large record books detailing funerals with which the company had been involved. These proved to be popular with members of the audience to consult for any details of friends or relatives. Ian would be happy to welcome members at the Frederick Paine Museum in Old London Road, Kingston. The museum is open on a Tuesday, free of charge.

**Friday 15 November 2013, 8 pm
The Bridges of Hampton Court
Imber Court, Ember Lane, KT8 0BT**

A group of MLHS members has been working hard for several months to research the four bridges over the River Thames at Hampton Court. At our meeting on Friday 15 November at Imber Court, you will be able to hear some of them speak about the rich history of the construction of the various bridges and the changes that have taken place in the surrounding area.

This is our major meeting of the year and we do hope you will come along and bring your friends to see the developments that have taken place in the Hampton Court Bridge area over the centuries. To whet your appetite, this is the first bridge, opened in 1753:



'This is a most beautiful and picturesque structure: the part which spans the river is constructed of timber, but the two abutments are built of stone: it furnishes a pleasing appearance in perspective from the adjoining shores of the river. The length is five hundred feet, and has seven arcs. The piers are cases of timber filled with stone. Barges of one hundred tons burthen pass through this bridge, by lowering down their masts; they are most commonly dragged by horses, which, on account of the shallow depth of water at certain times of the tide, are permitted to wade up the stream.' ('A Treatise on Bridge Architecture', by Thomas Pope, 1811).

There are equally fascinating stories to tell about the other three bridges and much to say about the present bridge, which was opened by the Prince of Wales in 1933.

Please note that the meeting will take place at Imber Court and not at Mole Hall, as stated on your programme card. Refreshments will be available from the bar. Parking is sometimes difficult at Imber Court, owing to the other events taking place there. You may wish to walk or to share a lift.

Members: £1, Non-members: £3

People and Buildings Group
Wednesday 27 November, 8 pm
British Legion, St Mary's Road

At our last meeting we welcomed four new members. We are busy researching information about Molesey Cemetery for next year's summer stroll. Our next meeting is at the British Legion on Wednesday 27th November at 8pm when we will be talking about childhood memories of playing down by the River Thames. All welcome as usual.

Wednesday 4 December, 2013
Magical Molesey
Tudor & Co, Walton Road

Once again Tudor & Co have invited MLHS members to join the Walton Road Christmas celebration on Wednesday 4 December from 5 to 7 pm. We will be showing displays of the Bridges of Hampton Court, and hope you will drop in for a chat.

Tuesday 4 February 2014, 8 pm
Members Evening
St Paul's Church, Church Road, KT8 9DR

What is your interest in the history of Molesey? Are you conducting your own research and would you like to share it with other members? The Members Evening is an opportunity for you to give a short talk and to show us the results of your work. Please contact Jenny Wood on 020 8979 0889 if you would like to give a short presentation (no more than 10 minutes) at our Members Evening to tell us what you have been working on.

60 years ago...

.....Molesey had its own monthly magazine, the Molesey Review. The first edition was published in May 1953, and delivered free to every household in Molesey.

The front cover carried an advertisement for the new Pye Television, with 14" tube, for £64 18s. from Edwin P Fox – 'Buy now for the Coronation'.



The contents included a profile of James Lindsay, Chairman of Hampton Court Laundry, an article about British Fondants Ltd, a factory in Avern Road, and an historical tribute to John Wilson Croker, a West Molesey resident who was an MP in the early 1800s and held the office of First Secretary to the Admiralty for 22 years.

The delight of the Review is in the snippets of information it gives. Under the headline: 'Doctor for West Molesey', we learn that Dr Rodger of Spencer Road requests planning permission to build a house and surgery on the corner of New Road and Walton Road. We also learn that during March that year, there were 72 cases of measles, 2 of whooping cough, 2 of scarlet fever and one of pulmonary tuberculosis.

Some things never change – 'Old Timer' reported: 'We like fish and chips very much, but we aren't keen on the noisy youths who hang around outside the West Molesey shop and annoy the residents in the flats above. We are not blaming the proprietor – we like his fish and chips.'

The Court Cinema changed its programme every three days, showing 'April in Paris', starring Doris Day, followed by 'African Queen'. And the star turn at the Casino on Tagg's Island was Pepita Ramirez, 'whose vivid, exciting dances of the East have been seen in 14 countries'.

There is a report on 'The Great Match', with the Duke of Edinburgh being among the 10,000 spectators watching the cricket match between East Molesey CC and the Australian touring team.

Under 'Sports Gossip' the question is asked as to why Molesey has no Swimming Club of its own. 'Here we are surrounded by three rivers, with a delightful open-air pool thrown in for good measure and what do we find? Our boys and girls go off to Kingston and join two clubs based there.'

The Review had something for everyone - ideas for taking better snapshots, and in the 'Feminine Feature, hints for knitting with nylon yarns.

The Society has almost every copy of the Review, which ran from May 1953 to January 1969. Our aim is to eventually scan every issue, and perhaps show them at a Members' evening.

Paula Day

Bronzed and Beautiful at Thames Ditton Library

Elmbridge Museum is currently showcasing Thames Ditton's past industrial glory through a series of displays at the Library located in Mercer Close.

The second display in the series is featuring the Thames Ditton Foundry, which started life in 1874. Until the end of November 2013

Molesey Characters - Charles Whatford



The Old Boat House

Charles Whatford, the son of Thomas Whatford, was born in East Molesey in 1842. By 1911 he was a well-known boat builder living at Boat Building Works and House, 9 Lock View, Hurst Road (now known as the Old Boat House) with his wife and two of his three children.

For some time he had used a hand propelled tricycle chair to get from his house almost opposite the lock to his boathouse on the foreshore. On Saturday 2nd June 1917, aged 75, a widower and described as a cripple, he drowned tragically in the River Thames. It appears that he lost control of the tricycle, which ran down the embankment and fell with him into the river. Two witnesses dived into the water and between them recovered the body.

It was reported that, in his younger years, he used to cross the river at Hampton Court Bridge by walking a barge rope with the aid of a balancing pole. His estate of £1,305 13s 11d was paid to his agent and also to a nautical ironmonger, leading to speculation that payment of his debts may have left no inheritance for his children.

Claire Annable