

Meeting Reports

AGM - St Lawrence School, Wednesday 29 April 2015

At our well-attended AGM in April, members heard Jenny Wood, the Society's Chair, give a summary of the past year. Seven events had been held: after last year's AGM Penny Rainbow had given a talk about Waynefleete Tower; at the annual meeting at Hampton Court Palace, Lesley Ronaldson spoke about Real Tennis and other Tudor Sports; the Summer Stroll had been researched by members of the People & Buildings Group, led by Anthony Barnes, and took us around Molesey Cemetery; in September Lindy Wilson of Walton & Hersham NADFAS told us about church recording and the treasures of St Peter's Church. In October, the Society held a two-day exhibition of Then and Now photographs, and the committee was currently working on producing a Then & Now book, aiming for publication in the autumn. November's meeting was a talk by Ian Chatfield, curator of the Surrey Infantry Museum, entitled "How the East Surrey's went to war in 1914. In February, Carole Garrard talked to us about Maps for Local History. In addition to these events, the Society had arranged tours of Waynefleete Tower, run a stall at Molesey Carnival and a display in Tudor & Co during the Magical Molesey Christmas event. Jenny also reported that in 2014 subscriptions had increased to £7, the first change since the Society's formation in 2007. Membership stood at 312, approximately 30 less than at the same time last year.

Members heard about the "People and Buildings" research group, under the able leadership of Anthony Barnes, which meets bi-monthly, and during the last year had researched Molesey Cemetery. They are now working on a booklet of trails around Molesey, and are researching schools for a future talk. In addition to the Schools project, the Society is aiming to research for a talk on Molesey Boat Club and Molesey Regatta, which have 150th anniversaries in 2016/17. Jenny asked if any member was interested in helping with this. She also requested volunteers to write reports of events in our newsletter, or if any member was doing their own research, perhaps on their house or family, to send in an article for the newsletter.

On behalf of the Society, Jenny thanked John Hutton, who was standing down from the committee, having been Treasurer since the Society was first formed. All other officers and committee had agreed to re-stand, and there were no further nominations, but we are delighted that Norma Millard has since joined the committee.

There was only one other piece of official business - a resolution to change the Society's constitution, amending the date on which membership becomes renewable, from 1st April to 1st January. This was proposed, seconded and approved by the members present.

David Garrick – 'Behind the Scenes'

Talk by Bill Weisblatt

Report by Lynda McCarter

After a speedy AGM, members were entertained by a talk on Garrick's Temple and Villa by Bill Weisblatt. Owing to his extensive knowledge and enthusiasm, we all also learned a tremendous amount about David Garrick the man.

Born in 1717, he was the second son of a French (Huguenot) father and a half Irish mother. The family lived in Lichfield where Garrick attended school and was on the receiving end of 'frequent beatings'. At the age of 11, he put on a school production of 'The Recruiting Officer', which was performed at the Cathedral. Due to his father's untimely death, Garrick was denied the chance of going to university. Instead he and his lifelong friend Samuel Johnson walked to London to find their fortunes.

Garrick studied law at first and then joined his brother in a wine business. In 1740 he wrote a comedy 'Lethe'. At this time writing was considered to be a gentlemanly career, whereas actors were considered scoundrels. Plays were censored by the Lord Chamberlain, a tradition that only ceased in 1968! As an actor, he was rejected at first by both Drury Lane and Covent Garden. He finally achieved critical acclaim playing Richard III at the Goodman Theatre in Whitechapel.

Later as actor/manager at Drury Lane he brought Shakespeare back into fashion, although he changed the ending of 'King Lear' to please the audience. Theatres were attacked and burned down on occasion, so this had to be taken into consideration. He completely changed the whole acting profession with his style of interacting with other members of the cast in a natural manner. Previously actors had delivered their lines directly to the audience instead of to the character to whom they were addressed.



Acting then became more respectable and treated as one of the 'liberal arts'. Garrick mixed in the highest social circles and became both very rich and famous. He was painted by everyone from Hogarth to Zoffany, both in character and as himself (here as *Richard III* by Hogarth).

After his marriage in 1749 to the ballet dancer Eva Maria Violette, they looked for a country house to buy and in 1754 Garrick and his wife moved to Hampton. The original farm buildings had been renovated by Robert Adam. When the house was finished the Temple was constructed to celebrate Shakespeare and a full-length statue of him by Roubiliac graced the interior. Unfortunately most of us remember the villa burning in 2008. It took six years to repair the damage, but it is now back to its former glory.

After his death in 1779, crowds of people visited his body as he lay in state. The grand funeral concluded with his burial in Westminster Abbey, a tribute to his fame and popularity. His widow lived on at Hampton for the next forty three years. His legacy is far greater than the Villa, Temple and Club, which all bear his name. His distinguished and innovative career changed the profession of acting for good.

**'Thomas Cromwell: The Untold Story of Henry VIII's Most Faithful Servant'
a talk by Tracy Borman, joint Chief Curator for Historic Royal Palaces
Clore Centre, Thursday 4 June 2015 - Report by Anthony Barnes**



Tracy Borman's gripping account of the life and career of Thomas Cromwell, Henry VIII's chief minister, reminded us of how ruthless and ambitious politicians will always divide opinion as to their motives, achievements and reputation. Over one hundred members came to the Clore Centre to hear Tracy's captivating reappraisal of one of the most difficult figures in British history. As Jenny Wood reminded us when she introduced our speaker, there are many historians in the same camp as Simon Schama who recently described Cromwell as a "detestably self-serving, bullying monster". This is a view that Tracy refutes, finding common cause with Hilary Mantel whose

engaging novels about Cromwell have helped a new generation to re-consider Cromwell's impact and legacy. Tracy herself is full of praise for Hilary Mantel's meticulous scholarship in researching *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*.

Tracy does not try to exonerate Thomas Cromwell for all his faults but to offer a more balanced judgement of the achievements of a minister whom Henry subsequently regretted sacking in 1540. She also succeeds in bringing Thomas Cromwell to life by blending the details of his public persona with insights into the man himself.

What Tracy did was to reveal to us how Cromwell succeeded in his career against all the odds. As a lowly-born son of a blacksmith, he ought not to have risen to the highest levels of power but he managed to fight off aristocratic prejudice by endearing himself to elite patrons and being generous, loyal, pragmatic and manipulative! Tracy told us that he escaped his troubled home life before he became a teenager, at the age of 11 or 12, and that he served as a mercenary in Europe. He became disillusioned with a soldier's life, making his way to Florence, where he entered the service of a wealthy banker, Francesco Frescobaldi. Under his patronage, Cromwell started to study law and learned several languages. After spending several years with Frescobaldi, Cromwell travelled to the Netherlands where he built up contacts in trade in the Low Countries.

When he returned to England, he became the protégé of Cardinal Wolsey, then master of Hampton Court, and started to conduct business for Henry VIII. When Wolsey fell from power for failing to secure a divorce for Henry, Cromwell's continuing loyalty towards Wolsey is one of his more endearing features. The way he plotted Anne Boleyn's downfall portrays him in a much more Machiavellian light. Cromwell was determined to stop Anne meddling in foreign policy matters and to capitalise on the fact that Henry wanted a male heir in order to shore up his relationship with the king. It is ironic, as Tracy Borman pointed out, that Anne's daughter, the future Elizabeth I, served the nation very well. How different might our island's later history have been had Henry not had this fixation for a male heir!

Speculation can be a frustrating business. Tracy told us that Thomas Cromwell married a wealthy widow which certainly did his political career no harm; but what conclusion can we draw about the state of the marriage? Tracy explained that only one letter by Thomas to his wife Elizabeth survives. It is a fairly perfunctory note in which Thomas explains that he is sending her a dead doe that he had killed on a hunt. It is not perhaps the most romantic of presents to send one's wife. However the tone of the address – "to my well beloved wyf" – suggests affection in the marriage. Tracy explained that this was a valuable gift in Tudor times and that there may have been a romantic play on the words 'hart' and 'heart'. It was also interesting to hear that Cromwell educated his daughters to the same standard as his son.

Many in the audience did not want Tracy's entertaining talk to stop and the questions had to be brought to an end. Afterwards, we realised that we had barely touched on key issues such as Cromwell's achievement in parliament and the effects of the religious controversies that culminated in the dissolution of the monasteries. There's only so much that can be covered on a sunny June evening on the banks of the Thames. Fortunately, those who would like to know more can get hold of Tracy's highly readable biography of Cromwell published in paperback earlier this year.

Bentalls

People & Buildings – Wednesday 27 May 2015



At the People and Buildings meeting at the end of May, Alex Beard, the Customer Service Officer at Kingston Heritage Service, gave a fascinating talk about the history of iconic Kingston retailer, Bentalls, with a whistle-stop tour of the first 100 or so years of the firm's history.

The story begins in 1867 when the 24-year-old Frank Bentall moved to Kingston to take over a small draper's shop in Clarence Street. The business was struggling, not least because there were 25 other drapers in the town centre. Also Clarence Street was an unfashionable thoroughfare consisting of tiny shops, cottages and a few old inns. The town's main shopping area was around the Market Place.

Frank built up the business, attributing his success to his insistence on the very highest standards of customer service. He then began to expand, initially turning a strip of garden alongside the shop into a millinery room, then taking over the shop next door. In 1900 he was able to purchase No. 25 and No. 27 which had been a shoe shop and confectioners respectively. The purchase of the confectioners was significant because it had one window on Clarence Street and one on Wood Street and thus Bentalls was able to turn the corner.

He then persuaded a primary school which backed onto the site to re-locate, and he transformed his four properties into one harmonious building. When the work was complete in 1904 Bentalls became a department store in the true sense of the word.

The business had been helped by the rapid growth of Kingston's population, and in 1906 by the coming of the tram, which entered the town via Kingston Bridge, so Bentalls was one of the first buildings people saw as they came in to town.

In 1909 Frank Bentall retired and his son Leonard took over as general manager. Leonard dreamt of uniting the Clarence Street and Wood Street premises into one single store where everything essential for modern living could be purchased under one roof, and in 1912 he changed the company name from Frank Bentalls to simply Bentalls. Leonard continued the policy of purchasing adjacent premises, and until Bentalls stretched right along Clarence Street separated only by the Clarence Arms. In 1919, Leonard finally convinced Hodgsons Brewery to part with the pub, and the stretch along Clarence Street was complete.

Always aiming to stay ahead of the game, in 1928 Bentalls became one of the first department stores to provide a car park. It housed 450 cars and was complete with a petrol station and its own restaurant. It was located on the other side of Wood Street, around where TGI Fridays is today.

By 1929 Leonard had acquired all the necessary properties to realise his dream of a completely rebuilt façade stretching from Wood Street round an impressive curved corner along into Clarence Street. The façade was inspired by the 17th century William and Mary wing of Hampton Court Palace and was designed by Sir Aston Webb & Sons. The façade was opened on September 9th 1935 and it was quite an occasion! The trumpeters of the Coldstream Guards stood in full ceremonial dress on top of the ground floor curved windows and gave hourly fanfares.



The interior was revolutionary at the time. At its centre was a vast hall with daylight flooding through its lofty glass roof. It had three floors running round three sides to give a tiered balcony effect. The escalators were very rare in UK stores at the time and were the first to be manufactured in Britain.

The store boasted 150 departments, had a selling area of 250,000 square feet and 2,500 staff. The store was also well known for hosting special events and performers. A circus regularly visited the store in the 1930s complete with lions and elephants.

Leonard Bentall's younger son, Rowan, joined the business in 1930 and joined his brother Gerald as a director in 1936. Their father died unexpectedly in 1942 and the vast estate duties forced Bentalls to become a public company.



Alex went on to talk about Bentalls' role in the war effort, and the Sports Club which was based at The Grove on Walton Road, West Molesey – more about that in our next newsletter.

Molesey Carnival Saturday 6 June 2015



It was a beautiful sunny day for Molesey Carnival and the event was very well attended. We had a steady stream of interested visitors to our tent, where there was a display of some of the 'Then and Now' photographs of the Carnival route through East and West Molesey.

The Carnival is a good opportunity for the Society to showcase some of its activities and for people to come and chat to us and, in some cases, give us interesting information and photographs, including this one from Carnival 1977.

Forthcoming Meetings

Tuesday 7 July 2015, 7 pm
Summer Stroll
Jason Debney – Thames Landscape Strategy
Royal Paddocks, Home Park
Home Park, Hampton Wick Entrance
(Park in Church Grove)

Our Summer Stroll takes place on the evening of Tuesday 7 July. Jason Debney of Thames Landscape Strategy will be leading our walk, which takes us to the Royal Paddocks in Home Park. We will be meeting at the Hampton Wick entrance to the Park at 7 pm and the walk will take at least one hour. Members will need to wear suitable footwear and waterproof boots are suggested if the weather is wet. The walk may take us over rough ground, as some roads and pathways may be occupied with contractors dismantling the Flower Show.

Members might wish to take the bus to Hampton Wick. If coming by car, parking may be found in Church Grove opposite the Park entrance.

There will be no charge for this meeting and it will not be possible to take membership subscriptions.

Wednesday 9 September 2015, 8 pm
R C Sherriff: From Towpath to Red Carpet
Talk by Loretta Howells (R C Sherriff Trust)
St Lawrence School, Church Road, KT8 9DR

Loretta Howells, Director of the RC Sherriff Trust will be giving us a talk entitled 'R C Sherriff: From Towpath to Red Carpet', about the playwright who was born in Hampton Wick and educated at Kingston Grammar School. You may notice that, owing to a misunderstanding, this is not the title listed on the 2015/16 programme, where it is incorrectly described as 'RC Sherriff and WW1'

After he left school Sherriff worked in an insurance office. From 1915 to 1918 he served as a captain in the 9th battalion of the East Surrey Regiment and was awarded the Military Cross. He wrote his first play to raise funds for Kingston Rowing Club and is most famous for his WW1 play 'Journey's End'. Loretta Howells' talk will be based on RC Sherriff's autobiography and will focus on his career as playwright, novelist and screenwriter.

There will be a charge of £1 for members and £3 for guests on the door and refreshments will be available.

People and Building Special Interest Group
Wednesday 29 July 2015
Molesey Royal British Legion, St Mary's Road

The next meeting of the People and Buildings research group will take place at 8pm on Wednesday 29th July at the British Legion. We will be talking about the British Iron and Steel Federation (BISF) steel houses built in West Molesey just after the Second World War. Do come along if you know anything about how these houses came to be built or if you are just interested in finding out a bit more about them. For further information, please contact Anthony Barnes (020 8979 6744 or people-buildings@moleseyhistorysociety.org)

60 YEARS AGO
THE MOLESEY REVIEW March – June 1955
by Jenny Wood

In March 1955 the Molesey Review reported that dry rot had "beset the roof timbers in St Peter's Church." The Vicar, the Rev Yeend, launched an appeal to his parishioners for "A penny a day" for the month of March to raise the £500 needed to repair the roof timbers. This appeal only brought in £120 so John Yeend decided to use his talent at indoor games to boost the appeal fund. He challenged all-comers at darts, draughts, dominoes, billiards, snooker and shove-halfpenny on the understanding that the loser subscribed to the dry rot fund. The May 1955 Review reported various successes for the Vicar including the defeat at darts of the publisher of the Review, Mr Clare, which cost the loser half a guinea.

The Review of March 1955 mentioned that in January Mr J. W. Grodeck had taken over a long established jewellery and watch repair business in Bridge Road and that he would trade under the name of "The Hampton Court Jeweller". The Review said that he intended to introduce ear-piercing and that this would be the first ear-piercing establishment in Molesey.

"Old Timer" complained about half-term holidays in the March 1955 Review, "During February many local children enjoyed a two-day mid-term holiday. Many adults wonder why a two-day holiday is necessary for when they were at school the half-term holiday was usually confined to a half-day. We hear numerous complaints about illiteracy yet holidays increase and our children have to absorb a lot of fancy subjects in less school hours. The three R's don't stand a chance."

In the same edition "Old Timer" also complained that certain consumer goods were cheaper in East Molesey than West, saying that presumably the cost of bus fares was taken into account. He was pleased that the first night safe in Molesey had recently been installed at the Westminster Bank in Bridge Road but pointed out again that this was in East Molesey.

The March Review reported that in February representatives of the Thames Conservancy, Surrey County Council and Esher Urban District Council had approved a flood alleviation scheme prepared by the Thames Conservancy. The scheme proposed the carrying out of works, principally on the River Mole from upstream of Royal Mills, Esher, down to Zenith Mills and included widening and deepening and the execution of light and steel piling protective works. The estimated cost of the scheme was about £120,000.

There was a report in the March Review of a performance by 'The Welcome Club' entitled 'The Spirit of Pantomime'. The Welcome Club was founded in 1948 and was "for the pleasure, recreation and comfort" of people over 60 years old.

Some snippets from the March 1955 Review:-

1. A double page advert taken by the landlords of the Prince of Wales Hotel in the March Review confirmed that renovations had been completed.
2. The Duchess of Gloucester had visited the Royal Cambridge Home to unveil a memorial plaque to Queen Mary.
3. Esher Council had approved a scheme to offer 'sitting tenants' of council houses terms for the purchase of their homes equivalent to the terms that had for some time been offered to 'sitting tenants' in privately owned houses. The minimum deposit required from tenants was £5 plus between £30 and £50 for stamp duty and legal costs.
4. A meeting was held at the Methodist Church to discuss the formation of a local company of the Boys Brigade.

On 6th June 1955 Willow Tools Limited, designers and toolmakers to the aircraft industry, opened a new factory in Island Farm Road. Willow Tools had been established in Weston Green since 1940. The opening of their additional factory in West Molesey enabled them to more than double their staff of about 30 people. Thames Tool Service Ltd, which was a subsidiary of Willow Tools, opened a 'trade counter' at the new factory, in addition to their existing premises at 8 Hampton Court Parade. (March and May Reviews)



The Personality of the Month in the April Review was Major William H. Smith, the managing director of Trianco Limited. Major Smith left school at 12 years old. He worked in light engineering but continued his studies at evening technical classes, eventually obtaining a string of engineering degrees. He devised numerous inventions, the most famous of which was the 'Smith' gun used by the Home Guard during the Second World War. After the end of the First World War he set up Trianco and was still its managing director in 1955 at the age of 70. He was involved in many local organisations and served as a Conservative councillor on Surrey County Council.

The May Review reported that the first house completed by Molesey Self-Build Housing Association was officially opened on 30th April by Admiral Lord Fraser. Esher Council accepted the names suggested by Molesey Self-Build Housing Association for the three roads which it was proposing to construct; these were Redland Gardens, a section of Molesey Avenue and Minster Gardens.

The death of the dog "Pat", which was often referred to as East Molesey Cricket Club's 'twelfth man', was reported in the May Review. Pat retrieved over 500 cricket balls from the River Thames, "was featured on newsreels all over the world and periodically 'made' the national newspapers."

The Molesey branch of Cullens Ltd won the challenge cup, contested by all 150 Cullens branches, for the branch showing the best all round effort. 1955 was the third year that the cup had been contested and was the first year that the cup had been won outright; in the previous two years it had been shared between two shops. (June Review)

Membership

The Newsletter is only sent to subscribed members of the Society and, if you have not yet renewed your subscription for 2015/16, you will have received a reminder with this Newsletter or by email. If you do not renew your subscription, this will be the last Newsletter you receive. We do hope that you will find something of interest in our forthcoming programme and decide to remain a member of the Society.

Hampton Court - Tudor Summer Palace – 11/12 July 2015

Enjoy a grand weekend of jousting and Tudor entertainment at Hampton Court Palace in the presence of Queen Mary I and King Philip II of Spain.

Join the court of Mary I and her husband, Philip II of Spain, in 1557 as England takes on Spain in a joust. The East Front Gardens will be taken over by daring knights on charging horses and dashing courtiers trying to impress the royal couple during a day of Tudor ceremony and entertainment.

Included in admission