

**Molesey Carnival
Saturday 7th June**

We shall again be having a stall at Molesey Carnival, which is on Saturday 7th June. The stall will give us an opportunity to publicise the Society and will also have displays of old maps and display boards on Molesey Hospital, the 1968 floods and the research groups.

There will also be a display and information about the Society at Midsummer Music at the Marker, on the evening of Friday 20th June at the Hurst Park riverside. Everyone is welcome.

**June Riverside Walk
Wednesday 18th June – from 7 pm**

Starting at about 7 pm from Hampton Court Station car park and with the aid of an illustrated map, members and visitors can wander at their own pace around Hampton Court Bridge, Creek Road and Bridge Road, along Riverbank and the Towpath to Molesey Boat Club (less than a mile) where the well-stocked, club-priced bar will be open for refreshment.

At about 8.15 pm Tony Osborne will give a very informal talk at the Boat Club about the Molesey Riverside, with reference to John Rennie's canal proposals of 1805 (the Canal that never was) and the extraordinary half mile long Molesey Riverside Boulevard proposed in 1913, but abandoned after objection from a group who formed the Residents Association to oppose it. (It's all in the book, *Thameside Molesey* by Rowland Baker, which has been reprinted and will be on offer during the evening).

Alfred Sisley's pictures of 1874 included the original lock keeper's house (demolished 1926) and Tagg's Boathouse (demolished 1995) and in 1844 the writer, James Thorne, described the scene thus 'The termination of the Mole is a noble one. From its mouth the Thames, with Hampton Court on the opposite bank, form a picture of surpassing beauty'. No one could possibly describe the present Jolly Boatman and Hampton Court Station in these terms. Proposals for the development of the area are under discussion now and the opportunity should be taken to restore some of its former beauty.

**1968 Floods
Friday 19th September – 8 pm
Mole Hall, Bishop Fox Way**

On Friday 19th September we shall be holding a meeting to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the 1968 floods. There will be film footage of the floods, some personal reminiscences and a display of photographs. If anyone has any photographs which they would be prepared to lend us for copying or scanning we should be grateful if they would please contact Doreen Freeman tel. 020 8979 0059. There will also be an opportunity to socialise and chat to people about the floods.

**Alfred Sisley
Tuesday 18th November - 8 pm
Molesey Youth Centre, Ray Road**

Talk by Nicholas Reed on the paintings of Alfred Sisley – 'Alfred Sisley on the Thames and the Welsh Coast', coinciding with the exhibition at the National Gallery.

Surrey History Centre Tours

Surrey History Centre in Woking is running a tour on Thursday 5th June at 2 pm. The tour is free but booking direct with the Centre is essential, telephone 01483 518537 – details on the Centre's website.

We have booked a tour of the Centre for members on Tuesday 30th September at 2 pm. If you would like to go, please let us know by email historysociety@btinternet.com, or telephone 020 8979 3465. It would be useful if you would let us know if you are able to drive to the Centre and are willing to offer a lift to non-drivers. There will be a charge of £3, with no charge for drivers.

We have been asked to organise a tour at a weekend. Unfortunately, the Centre does not normally run weekend tours. However, on Heritage Day, Saturday 13th September, it is likely that tours will be offered, although this is not yet confirmed. Anyone interested is advised to make contact with Surrey History Centre nearer the time (phone number above), as there will be no MLHS newsletter before then.

AGM

Our first Annual General Meeting was held at St Lawrence school at the end of April, and was attended by some 80 members. Chairman Jenny Wood welcomed everyone to the meeting, and reported that she hadn't realised how much interest there would be in the Society when it started, but by the end of its first year, it had 261 members. She then ran through a list of events that had been held in our first year, and thanked all those involved.

John Hutton, Treasurer, presented the accounts, and announced that the membership fee would remain at £5 for the year 2008/9, but warned that it may be necessary to charge for some events in the coming year.

With the exception of Tony Osborne, all the existing committee had agreed to re-stand, and Wendy Guest and Gail Petipher volunteered to join.

There then followed a talk by John Sheaf entitled "The Thames and Riverside Houses from Hampton Court to Hampton", after which members were able to enjoy a glass of wine or juice, and renew their membership.

The Thames and Riverside Houses from Hampton Court to Hampton

On Thursday 24th May, following the business of the AGM, John Sheaf led us on an illustrated journey from Hampton Court to Platt's Eyot, looking at the many and varied places in between, of which we can mention only a few in this report.

The first, highly decorative Hampton Court Bridge was built in 1753, but lasted only 25 years. Its replacement, also made of wood, had ten arches raised on piles, and lasted until 1864. The third bridge on that same site was made of wrought-iron lattice girders in five spans, and remains of the brick abutments survive to this day on both sides of the river.

Upstream of the bridge, on Hampton Court Road, there's a line of properties including the Old Court House, dating from 1708, when it was re-built by Christopher Wren. What is now Rotary Court has had a variety of uses, including a hotel, a military hospital and a maternity hospital. The oldest building along this stretch is the Royal Mews.

John then talked about Molesey Lock, which was opened in 1815, and its importance for the transportation of goods. The Molesey Boat Club was formed in 1866, and moved to its present location in 1901. The first Regatta was held in 1867, and is held annually on the 3rd weekend in July. Racing at the Hurst Park Racecourse began in 1891, and ran until 1962.

Back on the Middlesex bank, we come to the Swiss Chalet, which was imported in 1882 by a boat builder, Mr Hucks, and then the bridge to Tagg's Island. Along the edge of the grounds of the boat shed now occupied by Tim Barfield, an old milestone still survives.

John then went on to talk about the history of Tagg's Island, Fred Karno, and his houseboat Astoria; David Garrick's Villa, and his Temple to Shakespeare, Garrick's Ait, the houses in Thames Street and of course St Mary's Church – it's believed that a church has stood on this site since the early 13th century; the Bell Inn and Bell Hill, from which the Hampton Ferry would take people across the river to the Molesey Hurst.

Our journey along the Thames then covered Benn's Eyot, now the base for Hampton Sailing Club, the waterworks, and Platt's Eyot, which used to be a tree-clad island used for growing osiers – willow rods for making baskets. The soil excavated from the waterworks filter beds was dumped on the island, raising its level considerably. In 1889, Moritz Immisch began to build electric launches and canoes on the island, and in 1904, Thorneycroft's arrived on the island, and developed and built large numbers of boats, particularly during the First and Second World Wars.

John's talk concluded by reminding us that the distance covered is only a little over a mile and a half, yet this is a great deal of history relating to this very short stretch of the river and riverside, and that we must do all we can to preserve it.

The Hampton Court Fire of 1986
A talk by Dennis Ashbourne at the Clore Centre, Hampton Court.

Nearly 100 members and friends of the society attended a very interesting talk on the last fire at The Palace. The fire was located in the State Apartments of William and Mary, the later part of the building by Wren.

There was a previous fire in 1882, when a spirit lamp was overturned by a Miss Lucas. She returned to rescue possessions and suffocated in the smoke. Also shortly after this in 1886 a fire started by a naked flame damaged 40 rooms in chapel court.

The fire that we are most interested in is that of 1986, which started in the East End of the South Wing, the third floor, Lady Gale's apartment. The fire started on Easter Sunday night (31st March) and smouldered until the following morning when it was discovered, and was fully alight by 9 am. Unfortunately Lady Gale was killed in the fire.

The Fire Brigade now 120 strong had the fire under control by 9.30 am. The fire had spread along the third floor and penetrated to the floors below; bringing the ceilings down in this area. Fortunately the central spine wall maintained its integrity and prevented the total collapse of the structure.

The damage caused by the fire was of course added to by water damage, necessary to extinguish and prevent the spread of the fire. This meant that on the floor of the Cartoon Gallery and The Kings Apartment there was around a metre deep of very wet debris, including such things as an elaborate Crystal Glass Chandelier, of which all the pieces were rescued, repaired and re-assembled.

Palace staff managed to rescue all but one painting and one table, but as the fire continued they had to rescue mouldings and panelling from the fire brigade, who were throwing these damaged or partly burnt treasures out in a heap.

Within a couple of days a working party had been set up under the chairmanship of the Architect Michael Fishlock to set about the restoration. Their priorities were to protect the damaged section of the building, maintain its structural stability, salvage material, control damp and dry out the structure.

Dennis then proceeded to describe how with the aid of a number of expert craftsmen the restoration took place, costing £8.5 million. The restored South Wing was open by H. M. Queen on the 2nd July 1992

Thanks to Mike Guest for writing this report, it would be great if other members would volunteer to write meeting reports and other items for the Newsletter.