

THE SOCIETY

2008

2008 proved to be a challenging year for the Society, but one in which a great deal was achieved in spite of these challenges. It was the year in which we mourned the loss of not one, but two of our “elder statesmen”, but the year in which the Historic Buildings’ Group and the Buckinghamshire Conservation Trust were born, both of which will be increasingly important to our work in archaeology and heritage in the future.

At the Annual General Meeting in May 2008, Professor Bill Mead formally retired from his position as President of the Society, having served for seven years. Dr Richard Gem OBE, MA, PhD, FSA, was duly elected as our next President, bringing with him a wealth of experience and knowledge in the fields of archaeology and historic buildings.

Volume 48 of *Records of Buckinghamshire* was published this year, a large volume in excess of 300 pages, containing a range of articles both archaeological and historic in nature, with a particularly fascinating piece about Mormons in the county.

One of the main achievements of 2008 was the formation of the Society’s Historic Buildings’ Group, established following a series of workshops and site visits run during the autumn months. Over 20 people signed up for the workshop programme, which included lectures and practical sessions delivered by professionals in the world of historic buildings. The participants proved to be an enthusiastic and lively group, who were all eager to continue with the project. Consequently, a small steering group was convened with the intention of progressing and developing the work into 2009 and beyond.

A further exciting development involved the inception of the Buckinghamshire Conservation Trust, a body whose remit is to oversee the conservation of a number of historic sites within the county, including Quarrendon. The Society elected Dr Richard Gem as our representative and Trustee within this body, and we continue to eagerly await the transfer of the Quarrendon land by the developers, so that work can begin in earnest on the pres-

entation of the site as a heritage asset for the county.

During July 2008, the National Trust carried out an excavation and survey at Boarstall Tower as part of National Archaeology Week, partly funded by a grant from the Society. Over a nine-day period, teams of volunteers excavated five trenches and carried out a geophysical survey on parts of the site, with the aim of locating buried evidence for a former manor house, thought to have been demolished in 1778. A number of structures were indeed located, including a complex of three brick ovens, and pottery finds suggested that the house was occupied from the late 11th to early 12th century. The Society’s grant was awarded for post-excavation work and a full report will be published in due course.

COUNCIL

Four council meetings were held during the year: January 12th, March 15th, June 28th and October 11th, with the AGM being held on 17th May 2008.

The death of Edward Legg, following a debilitating illness, was of great sadness to all members of Council and the Society. Ted had been Chairman of Council since 1999, a post he held until the onset of ill health. His obituary appeared in *Records of Buckinghamshire* volume 49 (2009). Amongst his many achievements during his work for the Society, Ted transcribed Stanley Freece’s work on the county’s watermills, which was used in the publication of a fine book in 2007.

Our second sad loss during this year was that of Michael Davis, who had very ably stepped into Ted’s shoes as Chairman of Council until his own untimely death on 11th November 2008. Both these men contributed a great deal to the work of the Society, through their commitment, enthusiasm and passion for archaeology and history, and they added to our understanding and knowledge of our county’s past through their work, which is an invaluable legacy. Both will be greatly missed.

Another significant change to Council in 2008 was the retirement of Brian Davis after an impres-

sive 18 years as Honorary Treasurer. Brian gave exceptional service to the Society, for which he is afforded our thanks and good wishes for the future. The post of Treasurer is always a difficult one to fill, but we were fortunate to be able to appoint Nicola Savage to this position in October 2008.

Other changes to Council included the appointment of Honor Lewington to the post of Honorary Membership Secretary, a newly created position intended to separate out membership issues from the Honorary Secretary's role. Bob Zeepvat was appointed as Associate Editor of Records of Buckinghamshire in October following Mike Farley's retirement from this task. Once again, the Society must convey its heartfelt thanks to a member who has given many, many years of sterling service and who has helped to consistently raise the standard of this already fine publication.

Council members for 2008: Professor W.R.

Mead, President; Maureen Brown, Hon. Secretary; Brian Davis, Hon. Treasurer; Professor John Clarke, Hon. Editor of Records; Diana Gulland, Hon. Archivist and Librarian; Mike Palmer, Hon. Sec. Natural History Section; Mike Davis, Chairman of Council (retired at AGM but co-opted to Council at the June meeting); Roger Bettridge (retired at the AGM); John Cragg; Michael Hardy; Gary Marshall (National Trust); Dr David Thorpe; Dr Yvonne Edwards; Sue Fox; Dr Kevin Quick; Sandy Kidd (County Archaeological Service); Councillor Brenda Jennings (Buckinghamshire County Council); Mike Farley, Vice President and Hon. Associate Editor of Records; Dr Richard Gem, (elected President at the AGM); Julian Hunt, Hon. Newsletter Editor; George Lamb; Edward Legg.

Dr Ian Toplis and Marion Miller were elected to Council at the AGM in May.

Lecture Series 2008

5 January	The Archaeology of a Chiltern Landscape: Mike Davis
2 February	Popular religion in late medieval Aylesbury, Amersham, Chesham and Great Missenden 1480–1650: Marcus Cooper
1 March	The Archaeology of Taplow: Tim Allen
1 November	Grove Priory (La Grava): Evelyn Baker
13 December	George Gilbert Scott – Gawcott to St Pancras: Ian Toplis

Outings 2008

7 June	Tewkesbury and Deerhurst, led by Diana and Peter Gulland
19 July	Ightham Mote and Oldbury Hill, led by George Lamb
20 September	Church crawl to seven old village churches in the Milton Keynes area, led by Michael Hardy

Sue Fox, Honorary Secretary

THE LIBRARY

ADDITIONS TO THE SOCIETY'S LIBRARY AND ARCHIVE 2008

1. Books

AYLESBURY VALE DISTRICT COUNCIL:

- Akeley Conservation Area. 2008.
Bierton Conservation Area. 2008.
Dinton, Westlington, Upton and Gibraltar Conservation Areas. 2008.
Haddenham Conservation Area. 2008.
- BAILEY, K. Aylesbury: a county town and its station. Bucks Paper No.14, 2008.
- BAKER, Squadron Leader C. Royal Air Force Halton 95 years of aviation at Halton. 2008.
- BARNES, P. and SHELLEY, M., compilers. Simpson: people & places. 2003
- BOYLE'S court guide for January 1914. 243rd edition. 1914.
- BROWN, O.F. 'Stony Stratford': the town on the road. Repr. 2000.
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- ROTHSCHILD ARCHIVE REVIEW April 2006–March 2007. [Includes a cartoon of Lionel de Rothschild and an engraving of Market House, Aylesbury, 1860]. 2007.
- ROTHSCHILD, M. Walter Rothschild: the man, the Museum and the menagerie. Revised ed. 2008.
- RUTHERFORD, S. The Victorian asylum. [Includes St. John's Hospital, Stone]. 2008.
- SCRUTON, J. Stoke Mandeville road to Paralympics: fifty years of history. [Spinal Injuries centre, Stoke Mandeville Hospital]. 1998.
- SHARP, S.ed. Haddenham Chronicles, No. 5, Spring 2008; No.6, Autumn 2008.
- TAYLOR, R. and others, eds. Calendar of the Court Books of the borough of New Woodstock 1607–1622. Oxfordshire Record Society, Volume 65, 2007.
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- VAN DAM, T. My dearest Ben. An intimate glimpse into the world of Benjamin Disraeli, his family and the women in his life through their letters. Bucks Paper No.16, 2008.
- VINER, D. Wagons and carts. [Includes Buckinghamshire examples]. 2008.
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- WARD, Mrs. H. Marcella. [A novel of 1894 set partly in the Buckinghamshire Chilterns during a time of national social, economic and political turmoil]. Repr. 1984.
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- VIRGIL. *Opera omnia, clarrismorum viorum notationibus illustrata*. 1616.

3. Maps

- BARNETT'S street plan of Aylesbury, Wendover and Tring with road map of Buckinghamshire. 1950s.
- ENCLOSURE AWARDS.
Ellesborough. Copy of 1820 map with field names added.
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- CASSINI PUBLISHING. Milton Keynes & Newport Pagnell. Past and Present Map 1834 to present day. 2007.

4. Print

- Bow Brickhill church from the sandpit, by John Claude Nattes. n.d. (Bought from money saved on postage by delivering Records of Bucks by hand)

5. Additional items

- 77 smaller items were also added to stock. These included pamphlets, booklets, articles from journals and newspapers and church guides.

2. Aylesbury Grammar School books

- CHARPENTIER. *The life of Socrates with Xenophan's memorabilia*. 1712.
- DESCARTES, R. *Principia philosophiae*. 1677.
- GALTRUCHI, P.P. *Mathematicae totius*. 1668.
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*Diana Gulland
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THE NATURAL HISTORY SECTION

SUMMARY OF FIELD VISITS AND LECTURES ORGANISED BY THE SECTION DURING 2008

12th January. Wildlife Photography. Fifteen members came along for the first talk of the year, no doubt inspired by the quality of imagery from Paul Keene's last presentation to the Section in March 2006. And we were not disappointed. This time there was a more eclectic selection including free-flying Condors from the Andover Hawk & Owl Trust Centre, rutting Red Deer in Richmond Park, Snow Buntings on the Norfolk coast, Cirl Buntings in Devon and Puffins, Storm Petrels and Manx Shearwaters on Skomer Island. Closer to home were Greenshank at Tring Reservoir, enormous and impressive Starling flocks at Otmoor and a rarely seen visiting Purple Heron from the Chess Valley, near Latimer while close-up detail of a Humming-bird Hawkmoth, Roessel's Bush-cricket and Hornet Robber-fly were impressively revealed. Straying from natural history into archaeology views of the Hurlers triple stone circle on Bodmin Moor were also shown. John finished with a selection of images of his coast-to-coast trip to Australia, which included a nice contrast to our own Christmas card bird, a Yellow-breasted Robin.

23rd February. Winter Bird Watch to College Lake. Highlights for the twelve members in attendance were a pair of Bullfinches along with Greater-spotted and Green Woodpeckers.

15th March. Glow-worms. Twenty members were present to hear national expert John Tyler speak on his favourite subject. John noted that glow-worms were not worms but rather, beetles. While the Lesser Glow-worm is very rare in Britain, the more common *Lampyris noctiluca* Glow-worm can still be found by looking in the right place at the right time. Only the female glows, being wingless, to attract the much smaller, flying males during the mating season. The glow is produced by a chemical reaction involving luciferin and the enzyme luciferase. These react to produce 3% heat and 97% light. The best time to see glow-worms is late June to early July although it is sometimes possible to see them earlier and later than this. John noted that

the best time is to go out after a few days of bad weather as this prevents the males flying and results in a far greater number of females glowing when the weather improves. John described how the larvae feed exclusively on slugs and snails, which he equated to a young child taking on an elephant. They are armed with sickle-shaped jaws that inject poison to paralyse the mollusc. Due to the size difference, only a small part of the prey is eaten with ants and other insects moving in later to finish of the job. By comparison, very little seems to eat glow-worm larvae and, whereas a fierce centipede would be killed in a matter of moments by wood ants, glow-worms seem to walk through with impunity. Experiments have shown that a Robin, when presented with a mix of mealworms and glow-worms will expertly pick out all the former leaving the glow-worms to one side. This is due to a powerful poison held within spots along the side of the body capable of stopping the heart of a small lizard. John talked about Glow-worm distribution noting that they can be found as far north as the top of Scotland although they are far more common in the south, especially on the chalk grassland. Anecdotal reports of decline are hard to verify as numbers for any one site can vary tremendously from night to night. It is certainly true, however, that they are vulnerable to habitat change with grassland scrubbing over and becoming less suitable. Increased light pollution is also thought to make it harder for males to locate females. The limited mobility of the females means that once they have gone from an area they are very poor at re-colonising. A fascinating and well-illustrated talk and taster for June's field meeting.

12th April. Non-conformists of the Plant World. Twenty-two people stayed with us through the AGM to hear another of Victor Scott's entertaining talks, this time on that minority of plants that defy convention and do things differently. These fell into two broad categories, the parasites and the carnivores. Mistletoe was given as an example of a parasitic plant that, through its green leaves, has

the capability to make its own food but is, in fact, is a semi-parasite that supplements its rootless lifestyle up in the trees by stealing from its woody host. The attractive grassland plant, Yellow Rattle was illustrated as another example. Fully parasitic plants are identifiable by their lack of chlorophyll, such as the near white specimen of Toothwort that Victor picked near Wendover on his way to the talk. Other notable parasites illustrated included Common Dodder (from where, due to the effect on its nettle host, we get the term dodder) and several species of Broomrape. A number of saprophytic plants (those living on dead and decaying matter) were also shown including the extremely rare and seldom seen Ghost Orchid, last recorded from its south Bucks site in 1987 (and prior to that in the 1950s), along with the Bird's-nest Orchid and the orchid-like Yellow Bird'-nest. Moving on to carnivorous plants, Victor explained how, due to living in very nutrient poor soils, some plants had evolved a method of gaining nitrogen by trapping insects. The Venus Fly-trap, from North America, was shown along with a number of other exotics including the Hanging Pitcher Plants of south-east Asia. British examples included Butterworts and Sundews, all of which are commonly found in the northern uplands of Britain but for which there are only a handful of Buckinghamshire records. The aquatic Lesser Bladderwort was also shown. Bladderworts are named after the small underwater structures used for trapping tiny aquatic invertebrates such as water-fleas. Lesser Bladderwort has been recorded from a pond in Burnham Beeches where its flowers may be seen emerging from the water surface in July but for the rest of the year is entirely submerged. A comprehensive talk looking at local, national and international species all photographed during Victor's extensive travels.

10th May. A botanical walk from Steps Hill to Duncombe Terrace. Roy Maycock. Several members turned out for this joint meeting with the Buckinghamshire Rare Plants Recording Group (BRPRG). Two members of the latter group who live locally were able to take us straight to some Pasque-flowers, *Pulsatilla vulgaris*. About 60 plants had been recorded during the flowering season. A few plants of Field Fleawort, *Tephrosieris integrifolia* were found nearby in what is likely to be a new area for the records. The keen eyes of

another BRPRG member also spotted one flowering Early Gentian, *Gentianella anglica* (although 86 plants were recorded nine days later). A very enjoyable trip enhanced by the sharp eyes of several keen botanists.

27th June. Evening Glow-worm Walk. Fourteen people met in the Whiteleaf Cross car park just before 9pm (including one couple who had driven down from Stockport, Greater Manchester, having found out about the meeting from someone in Gloucester!) As it was still reasonably light, leader Martin Harvey provided an informative introduction to the biology of the Glow-worm for those people who hadn't made it to John Tyler's talk earlier in the year. With dusk setting in we headed across the road, through the woods and out onto the grassy slopes of Brush Hill. We stood for a while watching the dusk intensify over the lights of Monk's Risborough below before setting off to the shady edge of the field. Within two minutes our first female glow-worm was spotted. A couple of minutes later another one was found and then another and another. By now, it was possible to stand in one spot and spy up to a dozen, seemingly flickering in the grass due to the effect of the wind on the long leaf-blades. Such evening events can be a bit hit and miss depending on both the weather and the glow-worms. Tonight was certainly a resounding hit!

12th July. Geological field trip to Pury End Quarry, Northants. Fifteen people attended this joint meeting with the Bucks Earth Heritage Group just over the Buckinghamshire's northern border into Northamptonshire, between Stony Stratford and Towcester. Michael Oates provided an introduction to the site describing the Middle Jurassic sequences found here, including exposures of Blisworth Clay, Blisworth Limestone and the Rutland Formation. These were formed on a shallow warm sea-floor around 175 million years ago. A low-lying island would have been present to the south, lying where London now is, and extending to the east, forming what is now the Ardennes Hills in Belgium. Fossil finds included sea urchins, bivalves and gastropods along with some flat mollusc-crushing shark teeth. Above these ancient sea sediments was a layer of Boulder Clay left by the ice sheets of the ice age a paltry 120 thousand years ago!

5th October. *Fungus Foray with the Bucks Fungus Group to Rushbeds Wood.* Unfortunately no members were able to attend this meeting.

18th October. *Buckinghamshire's Rare Plants.* Due to an unfortunate rescheduling, only six members were present for this talk. Roy Maycock began by outlining the work of the Buckinghamshire Rare Plants Recording Group, now in its second year. The main aim is to look at the existing data and, by means of targeted field meetings and individual fieldwork, amass more with a view to producing a *Rare Plants Register* for the County in order to help inform future conservation efforts. Roy defined a rare plant as one that occurred in less than three 1km squares within the County. These could include both nationally rare species and nationally common but locally rare species. While known introductions were generally excluded, long established species, *i.e.* those introduced prior to 1500 could be considered. Roy then proceeded to show photographs of some of the hundred or so species currently on the County's rare plant list. Among these were Wild Celery, the diminutive Moonwort, the carnivorous Oblong-leaved Sundew, the spring-flowering Early Gentian and Pasque Flower and the autumnal Fringed Gentian along with Bucks specialities, the Red Helleborine and Military Orchid. This is an excellent project undertaking co-ordinated fieldwork at a time of increasing change in the countryside. Anyone wishing to find out more about this project should contact the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre, Tring Road, Halton, Aylesbury, HP22 5PN or phone 01296 696012.

15th November. *The Ridgeway.* Fourteen members were present for this welcome return of John Tyler,

this time talking about walking the 87 miles of the Ridgeway path. After a potted history John took us along the track noting some of the key sites, from the remains of stone age flint mines on Pitstone Hill and Grim's Ditch near Wallingford, to the more high profile sites of Uffington White Horse, Wayland's Smithy and Barbury Castle, one of eight Iron Age hillforts *en route*. He also provided commentary on the natural history to be found along the way, including our own Aston Clinton Raggpits, home to Common Twayblade, Greater Butterfly Orchid and Pyramidal Orchid while further along was one of the three British sites for the Red Helleborine. This rare orchid is pollinated by the male of a particular species of solitary bee, the female, preferring the nectar of Cluster Bellflower. Other highlights included Treecreepers and Nuthatches in the beech-clad Chilterns section, the bright pink autumnal berries of the Spindle Tree that lined the track near Chinnor and the vanilla-scented Monkey Orchid near Goring. In due course our photographic walk reached the Ridgeway end point at Avebury. Slides included both the familiar sites of the stone circle, avenue, Silbury Hill and West Kennet long barrow along with less visited site such as the Polisher, a sarsen found on nearby Fyfield Down with a series of grooves and round shallow basin created by the repeated sharpening of axes. An enjoyable and inspiring talk as evidenced by the number of questions at the end seeking advice on the various practicalities of walking this ancient route.

Mike Palmer
Keeper of Natural History
Buckinghamshire County Museum
Resource Centre