

MINUTES OF THE 96th MEETING OF AYNHO HISTORY SOCIETY HELD AT THE VILLAGE HALL, AYNHO ON WEDNESDAY 26th APRIL 2017

Present: - Rupert Clark – Chairman
Peter Cole – Secretary

1) Secretary's Report

Sybil Stevens has donated to the archive a list made by author Ted Humphris of all the Aynho Estate farms in the first quarter of the 20th century, and more importantly two Aynho National Fire Brigades' Association's Long Service Medals. One was awarded to her father Harry Humphris, the lorry driver that pulled the appliance. In Harry's case there is also a press cutting from the Banbury Guardian dated November 3rd 1927: "One of the most disastrous fires to have occurred in a local village for many years took place in Kings Sutton on Saturday morning, as a result of a boy playing with a firework. A row of seven cottages including two detached ones, were destroyed. The fire attracted people from all around and a large crowd came to inspect the ruins." A hand-written note on the slip states that H Humphris was first in action with the Aynhoe Park engine. The second medal is for Thomas Humphris, Sybil's grandfather.

2) History of Royal Woodstock

by Dr. Robert Edwards

The history centres on the Royal Park of Woodstock. The park was formed in 1110 by enclosure of common land by Henry 1. To the deer park were added exotic animals, it became a Zoo, probably the oldest in the world. These animals were kept there until 1252, when they were transferred to the Tower of London, and later to Regents Park; London Zoo as we know it today.

Henry II wanted King William the Lion of Scotland to marry into his family, but the only relative available was an illegitimate cousin. William only consented when Henry agreed to pay for the whole wedding at Woodstock, and as a further sweetener, added Edinburgh Castle as a dowry. Henry gave the land for the town of Woodstock to be built to house the Court hangers-on. He had a lady friend called "Fair Rosamund". Close by the Blenheim Bridge today is Rosamund's Well. Rosamund's Bower has been flooded by Capability Brown's lake.

Henry III extended the main house. In recognition of Edward III's use of Woodstock, the town took his tree stump symbol as its coat of arms. His wife Queen Philippa was very fond of Woodstock and their sons were born here. Henry IV and Henry V both continued to use the tree stump as their badge.

Henry VI gave Woodstock the oldest surviving Royal Charter which not only entitled the borough to hold markets and fairs. Henry also gave the water meadows, which lie between Old Woodstock and the new town. The Charter also exempted the town from sending members of Parliament because the borough was so small and poor. Later on this became an advantage as the seat could be sold as a rotten borough. The last person to hold this office was Randolph Churchill, father of Winston.

Henry VII who deposed Richard III added the imposing gatehouse to Woodstock Manor, the must-have item of that day. Wanting to impress Spain, the global superpower, he chose Woodstock for the betrothal of Arthur his very young son and heir to Catherine of Aragon (the Spanish Ambassador standing in for the bride). Arthur died young, so Henry VIII married the young widow

Catherine. During his lifetime Henry acquired at least 50 palaces. He couldn't visit most of them often, and many got run down. After she failed to produce a male heir he left Catherine at Windsor and came to Woodstock with Anne Boleyn. It was here that she conceived Elizabeth before his divorce from Catherine. The third royal mistresses after Rosamund and Anne appeared in 1536. When Edward VIII was on the throne and it was not easy for him to meet up with Wallis Simpson, he let it be known that he was going to visit Blenheim, so the Simpsons met him there.

During Mary Tudor's reign Elizabeth was sent to the Tower of London, but fearing that the public would not like this it was decided to set up a country branch of the Tower at Woodstock. Elizabeth was sent there for a year, where 200 soldiers ensured she was cut off from outside contacts. Rather surprisingly it was Philip of Spain who suggested her release as he realised Mary was past child-bearing age, and her likely successor was Mary Queen of Scots, who would ally the country with France, which would not suit him at all. If anything happened to Elizabeth the country might revolt. Elizabeth was restored to Court and eventually came to the throne. She visited Woodstock several times, and later gave the Chantry Houses in Woodstock to the town in exchange for an annual rent of four pounds six shillings and eight pence a year. No one was aware of inflation in those days, so this same rent has been paid ever since. In 1974 the Borough of Woodstock ceased to exist, and it was agreed that these buildings including the Post Office and the shops next door to it could be transferred to the Parish Council, now the Town Council. The rents received from these mean that we pay a lower Council Tax than any other town in Oxfordshire.

During the first English Civil War, Oxfordshire was the Royalist centre, but after the defeat at the Battle of Naseby the King left, and Oxford and the surrounding towns surrendered. Woodstock Palace had been badly damaged so the stones were sold off, and for many years the town became rather run down.

In 1704 the Duke of Marlborough was at the height of his success, and Queen Anne gave him the Royal Park. Blenheim Palace was built. It was the fourth Duke who employed Capability Brown on a very grand scale to create the Grand Bridge, the huge lake and the other works in the grounds.

In 1874 Winston Churchill was born at Blenheim. He was very proud of being an ancestor of the 1st Duke, and probably felt that like him he could one day save his country. Between the wars he became a territorial army Officer, while at the same time writing a biography of Marlborough. During the First World War no fewer than 44 men from the small town of Woodstock with only a population of 400 gave their lives.

During the Second War 16 men were lost, which was again about average for the size of community. A large number of evacuees were sent to Woodstock – 130 children arrived on 1st September, war was declared on the 3rd, and another 101 smaller children with 50 mothers came then. This caused quite a few problems in such a tiny place.

Finally it must be mentioned that for many years there was a thriving glove trade in Woodstock, going back to the Middle Ages until about 1850, and we were exporting 7,000 pairs a week. Many women were working away in their cottages and there were several glove factories.

3) Next meetings –

Wednesday 31st May – **“The Cold War in Oxfordshire”**

Wednesday 28th June – **“A Sunday afternoon with a School logbook” a review of the Aynho School log.**