

MINUTES OF THE 19th MEETING OF AYNHO HISTORY SOCIETY HELD AT AYNHO VILLAGE HALL ON WEDNESDAY 27TH MAY 2009

Present: – Brian Reynolds - Chairman
Peter Cole – Secretary.

At least 42 other members and guests attended.

1 Correspondence

The secretary had received no correspondence this month.

2 Chair and Finance Report

There is £787.28 in the bank account.

We will be attending the Brackley History Society Exhibition on June 6th at Brackley Town Hall, with a display of artefacts, and possibly some armaments.

We shall also have a stand at the Church Fete the following Saturday June 13th in Aynhoe Park.

The Cartwright Arms pub sign is now in our possession. Robin Cox is removing the steelwork so that we can easily display the sign. It was suggested that subject to the approval of the Village Hall Committee, it should be displayed on the wall there. This was agreed. It was also agreed that Robin Cox could have the steelwork.

Brian proposed that the annual student membership of Aynho History Society should be £1, and 50p per meeting. This was seconded by Jean Darby and agreed.

3. Iford Manor & Peto Garden

Tuesday 6th October 2009

The coach for this trip is almost full already, so anyone else wishing to go should let Brian know as soon as possible.

Brian also mentioned that Rightracks survey forms are available for anyone to complete and return to the Clerk as soon as possible.

4. Aynho Tunnels Project Update

Brian Reynolds

Brian said that Wendy Morrison is double-booked for tonight and sends her apologies. He read details she had sent him.

Various tunnels have been found in places as far apart as Stourbridge, Pembury Abbey, Frome and Bridgewater. Some are due to smuggling activities. There is a monks' tunnel near Barnsley. The tunnels in Aynho are purpose-built, deliberate and extensive. They would have taken many man-hours to construct. Cross marks on a pillar in Aynhoe House could suggest a religious connection, but Professor Martin Hennig considers that they are of Civil War origin, and were constructed to give the soldiers based at Aynhoe something to do, although it could also have been a means of escape if required. The extent of the tunnels needs to be mapped. This will require various methods, such as magnetometers, resistivity and ground-penetrating radar. Due to the depth of the soil, the last of these would be the most probable technique. It is likely that a local archaeological society will do most of this work before any possible investigation by Time Team, and O.U.A.S. would be happy to do this.

Brian said that perhaps we could approach James Perkins to see if he would be prepared to fund some of this research in his grounds.

5. Lark Rise to Candleford

Martin Greenwood

Brian introduced Martin Greenwood, who lives in Fringford, the actual village where the Lark Rise author, Flora Thompson, came to work at the post office back in 1891.

Martin said that for the last 15 years he has followed in Flora Thompson's footsteps. He has just written a new book, which hangs on the TV series.

Flora herself (Laura in the book and the series) was born in Juniper Hill (Lark Rise), went to school in Cottisford (Fordlow) and went to work in Fringford (Candleford Green) from 1891 to 1897. From then on she spent the rest of the life in Hampshire and Devon.

The series was not filmed locally. Fringford, where the post office and forge building still stands as a private house, is a quiet village, whereas Candleford is a town, which is a mixture of what Brackley, Buckingham and Banbury were like. The producer of the TV series, Bill Gallagher, wanted to highlight the distinction between the poverty of life in the tiny hamlet and the relative prosperity and sophistication of a place like Candleford.

Bill had originally proposed the series almost ten years ago, but his senior at the BBC was against period drama with more than 4 episodes. He eventually approached someone at ITV, but when he told the BBC he was taking the drama there, within a month a ten-part series was commissioned, with the promise of more to follow.

Not everything in the series is in the book. The acting is very good. In particular Queenie is the most authentic character as the wise woman of the village. Her husband, Twister, is also a great character. In real life Queenie sadly died in the workhouse, as she had no children to support her. This was a very sad fate for anyone, but all too common in those days.

Sir Timothy, the Squire, was actually Edward Slater-Harrison, Squire of Shelswell Park. The big house there has long since fallen into disrepair and vanished. He was the one before whom Flora had to sign her oath of allegiance to the Post Office. He was a JP, who owned a lot of Fringford, and was a good man and well liked and respected. His second wife, Cecelia, (Lady Adelaide) was remembered by Flora as being tall, thin and aristocratic-looking.

The biggest character in the book is Dorcas Lane. In real life she was Kezia Whitton, daughter of a blacksmith, who married a blacksmith, and was therefore quite able to manage that business as well as the Post Office, when her husband died soon after Flora arrived. The main difference between her and her TV counterpart was in size. Kezia weighed 18 stone, and you can still see the top window of the forge, which has been re-bricked, where the window and some bricks had to be removed on her death, as her body in its coffin was too big to be taken down the narrow stairs of the building. The person taken on by Kezia as blacksmith was Frederick Plumb, and his grandson was still living in the forge when Martin came to Fringford. Kezia certainly enjoyed being at the centre of the community, as a lot of people had occasion to visit either the forge or the Post Office at some time during the day.

Zillah, the old servant in the early series, was actually based on Zilpha Hinks. She was not that old, as she died aged 45, not long after Flora left Fringford, and her grave is marked by an iron cross in the churchyard. Her replacement, Minnie, is complete fiction as far as Martin knows.

To emphasise how poor life was in hamlets and small villages, it was noted that most of them were "closed". In other words the tiny houses were all owned by the big house controlling the area. In Cottisford they didn't like the poor, and in 1754 they built a couple of cottages for them on Cottisford Heath, so that they could be removed there, and they later built some more. Cottisford was one of the last to be "closed", and then only after the Cottisford riots in the 1850s. People then got squatters rights to cottages if they managed to get smoke coming out of a chimney for 24 hours. There was a widespread belief amongst the old in Juniper that the former Cottisford Heath had been left for the poor, and the deeds hidden in the local church, from whence they were stolen. One of Flora's great quotes was "Poverty is no disgrace, but it is a great inconvenience".

Flora's family lived in the end house. Her father, Albert, was a stonemason, and had been a very good one, but he was a difficult man, and possibly affected by alcohol, so not too easy to live with. Robert in the series is probably too nice a man.

Queenie was still doing her lace making and looking after her bees, until she had to go into the workhouse. Martin produced a photo of the real Queenie taken in the 1880s, given to him by her great, great granddaughter.

Houses were very basic. It was the object of most families to get their daughters out to service by the age of 12 or 13 if possible. The pig was everyone's pride and joy. They were regularly compared one to another, and when the slaughterer came they were all shared around. Every part of the pig was used or smoked to make it last as long as possible. The main aim of everyday living was to balance out the tiny income with expenses such as food, boots, coal or faggots and other essentials like candles, lamp oil and club money (insurance) each week. Allotments were vital to subsidise bought food.

"Pay your own way", "Don't flinch", "Look out for yourself", "Us will get over it" and "Avoid the Workhouse at all costs" were familiar catchphrases of the day.

In response to questions Martin agreed that the Shelswell estate was a very big estate of 3,000 to 4,000 acres in the past. It was reduced in size following the death of the owner in 1967.

It was noted that old cottages used to have outdoor toilets at the bottom of the garden, and when these were replaced by modern ones inside the houses, some neighbours complained because they couldn't chat to each other any more.

Peter Cole said that he had read one of the books about Flora Thompson brought along by Martin Greenwood, from which he had established that for Aynho residents there was a remote connection with the Lark Rise saga. The second wife of Squire Edward Slater-Harrison, Cecelia (Lady Adelaide) was in fact a Cartwright, her grandfather having been William Ralph Cartwright. Christine Bloxham, author of that book, had examined census records in detail, and the Caroline Arless of the series was in real life Caroline Ariss. She and her husband, Uriah, appear in four successive censuses, and are recorded as having at least 11 children.

Brian thanked Martin for his informative talk.

6. Forthcoming Meetings

June 24th	Visit to Croughton Church (7.00 pm)	Revd. Terry Richards
July 29th	Visit to The Quaker Meeting House in Adderbury	Nick Allen
August		No meeting
September 30th	AGM England's Canals - Past & Present	Peter Cole
October	Iford Manor (6th)	