

MINUTES OF THE 35th MEETING OF AYNHO HISTORY SOCIETY HELD IN THE APRICOT ROOM OF THE CARTWRIGHT HOTEL ON WEDNESDAY 26th JANUARY 2011

Present: – Rupert Clark – Chairman
Peter Cole – Secretary.

1. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Brian Reynolds.

2. Chairman's Report

Rupert Clark

Rupert told everyone that sadly Marjorie Tolchard had died in December. Not only had she been a regular member, but she had almost completed cataloguing our Archive of photos and bits and pieces about Aynho. He suggested that at future meetings, small parts of the Archive could be made available on our back table for other members to see what we had collected. It would also be a reminder of her work.

He said that some time ago John Fulcher had very kindly given the Society a donation of £100. Considerable thought has gone into trying to find something both useful and relevant to use this for. Peter had suggested that this money should be used for the renovation of the Cartwright pub sign and it's fixing on the Village Hall wall. This is particularly relevant to John, since it is the sign he would have passed and seen almost every day during his stay here, and it is now on the wall almost exactly opposite the piano to which John donated a large sum, and his wartime photos. Rupert seconded this, and it was agreed. Peter had prepared a letter for John, with photos of the sign on the wall and the piano, with a close-up of the sign itself.

There is now a History Society email address on the village website, which is linked to Peter's email address, so that if Peter were away, it could easily be transferred to someone else.

Last December we had had an Admin Committee meeting. We have been approached by the Parish Council to see if we could host a Village History Walk as a substitute for the usual Farm Walk this year. Rupert will go to the next Parish Council meeting to establish exactly what is required.

3. Finance Report

Brian had left a note that the funds stood at £803 55, plus monies collected tonight, as subscriptions were due.

4. Secretary's Report

Peter Cole

Peter said that following the Admin Meeting he had approached the Parish Council's insurers about the possibility of insuring the painting donated to us by David Morgan. This was by Lili of Aynhoe, and had been authenticated and valued by Mrs Cartwright-Hignett at £1000, as she has quite a few others by her great, great grandmother. The insurers had said that the cheapest way of doing this would be by adding it specifically to the Parish Council's insurance policy, if they were happy with this. If so the annual premium would be £25, with a policy excess of £250 for any item. The most appropriate time to start this would be when the policy is renewed on 1st June. This would enable everyone's agreement to have been reached, and a photo of the painting together with measurements to be supplied to the insurers. If everyone was happy to go ahead with this, Peter would also go to the next P.C. meeting on 1st February to deal with it then. This was agreed.

Peter has already received three emails in the last week through the Aynho History Society website from people enquiring about Aynho families.

5. Musical Instruments through History

Richard York

Rupert introduced Richard York, who spends his life visiting schools and other bodies to inform them about early music and instruments, and to play these to illustrate the development of music through the centuries. He had brought along a variety of unusual instruments. Richard said that these looked to be mediaeval to Victorian in appearance, but were in fact modern reproductions, since very few old instruments have survived. The ones he had brought along included various bagpipes, a couple of harps, and several hurdy-gurdies.

We only know exactly what music sounded like from the turn of the nineteenth century, when recording equipment came in. Prior to that we can only make an informed guess what it may have sounded like. While some instruments of the time survive to be copied, for example a lute from the 1590s still currently being played in concerts, we have few of them, and in the case of bagpipes, none that Richard is aware of older than the 1700s, so we don't know exactly what they looked like.

Drones (the long base pipes of a bagpipe) in carvings tended to be short and stubby, whereas it is believed that in practice they were considerably longer. The first one Richard played had a three foot drone. The Luttrell Psalter, from 14th C. Lincolnshire shows bagpipes looking rather like a modern Spanish gaita. Chaucer's Miller's was a bagpiper, and Richard played "Angelus ad Virginem", a tune mentioned in his tale.

Bagpipes are not Scottish in origin. They probably came to Britain with the crusaders, from the Saracens. Having a bag enabled a drone and chanter to keep playing a continuous note, meaning the piper could carry on playing while he took a breather.

The next set of pipes was after a painting by Brueghel. These had a very long bass drone, over four feet long, split into sections for easy carrying which are tied together to avoid losing them, just as in the paintings. It could play very low notes in the background, with melodic notes for the main tune.

This was followed by smaller Hummelchen bagpipes.

Next came a shawm, or "Hautbois". It had quite a strident tone. Richard explained that quiet instruments were called "low", and loud ones "high", hence its name in French "haut bois" or "high wood", which later became "oboe" in English. Richard said that it was quite hard physical work to play, especially compared to the recorder. For this reason quite often well-to-do people employed others to play for them. As an aside he added that music was a high status commodity, and in medieval times it was not unknown for nobility to compete over the quality of their choirs, and sometimes a good choir might even be kidnapped, in order to sing for another duke or king.

While the shawm Richard brought was only four years old, shawms have a very ancient history. Next was a crumhorn, like a short walking stick with a wide gape, which sounded a little like a kazoo.

Richard said that we tune our instruments differently since the time of Bach, that scales prior to that would sound strange to our modern ear, and illustrated this with a "saz", a member of the lute family, which is tuned in an Eastern scale requiring 16 frets to the octave, rather than the western 8 semi-tone octave.

A Turkish lute called an "oud" (for "wood") and "Al Oud" gives us our word "Lute".

Richard had brought two harps, the first a wire strung harp. It was a one-off instrument, made for Richard personally in memory of his father, who had died a few years ago. It is shaped like the harps shown on Irish coins. Richard played an Elizabethan favourite, "Packington's Pound". He said that in Tudor times harp players were highly valued.

In Ireland the harper's place would be often sitting at the King's table and sharing his food. Henry VIII was painted playing the harp, and had a harper whom some say was Irish.

The other harp was a tall gut strung harp, which was much lighter, as the strings don't pull so hard so that it could be made out of a single block of thinner wood. This type of harp is therefore easily hand-held. It has a more delicate and melodic sound.

Richard moved on to his two hurdy-gurdies. These instruments go back almost 1000 years. They are strapped on, and have a wheel, which is turned to produce a sound, which can be varied by pressing frets onto the strings. Richard illustrated the keys that do this by showing a very rare key fiddle, rather like a hurdy-gurdy, but played instead with a bow.

They have to be tuned regularly. Indeed it is a regular joke that hurdy-gurdy players spend half their time tuning their instruments, and the other half playing out of tune.

By 1500 it was more of a dance instrument. His first one is about 18 years old. A loose bit of wood vibrates to make a buzzing noise, which is used as a rhythm section. Vivaldi once wrote a concerto for a hurdy-gurdy.

The key fiddle he showed is thought to be one of only two in England, and is derived from carvings in a church in Germany, based on an illustration in an encyclopaedia of music from the early 1600s, and from a surviving instrument found in Mora in Sweden.

The second hurdy-gurdy, a larger, posh one, is based on one made by Pajot, a Frenchman in the 19th century. It has much more decoration and is louder than the first.

Richard ended by returning to bagpipes.

England has its own bagpipes. The French have fifteen varieties, we have one. They are Northumbrian smallpipes. They have bellows under the arm, so you don't need to blow at all.

Originally it only played tunes with 8 notes or fewer, but by 1800 four extra holes and keys with extensions were added.

Northumbrian smallpipes have plugs in the end of the chanter, to allow staccato playing when all the fingers are placed on the holes. The keys allowed more complicated tunes to be played.

In response to questions Richard said that this was only a selection of his instruments. He has accordions, concertinas, a harmonium, and many other unusual instruments. His wife Elizabeth, who often accompanies him, is a harp specialist, though she also plays many other instruments. The final instruments played by Richard were the pipe and tabor. This consisted of a drum which looked like a tambourine, but without any jingles, supported by the left hand, and played with a small stick by the right hand, and a three-holed pipe, played simultaneously with the left hand.

Rupert thanked Richard for a fascinating presentation.

6. AOB

None.

7. Forthcoming Meetings

February 23rd	Photographs of old Aynho	Brian Reynolds
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March 30th	The Cartwright Papers	Jim McDermott
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April 27th	Welsh Roads	Bruce Smith
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