

# MINUTES OF THE 84th MEETING OF AYNHO HISTORY SOCIETY HELD AT THE VILLAGE HALL, AYNHO ON WEDNESDAY 27<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2016

Present: - Rupert Clark – Chairman & Treasurer  
Peter Cole - Secretary.

## **1. Chairman's Report**

Copies of Nicholas Cooper's Aynho book have become available for sale at £15. A visit to Rousham House suggested last year would have to be on a Sunday afternoon. Let Rupert know if you would like this to be arranged.

## **2. Secretary's Report**

Rupert, Keith and Peter as representatives of the Cartwright Archive have met Sarah Bridges (Archivist) at the Northants Records Office to discuss the Archive's conservation and future. Further updates once the Charity Committee has met in February.

## **3. "A History of the University of Oxford"**

**by Alastair Lack**

Oxford is the third oldest university in Europe, behind Bologna in Italy and the Sorbonne in Paris. There were students in Oxford in the 1090s, but this was not under grad education, as we know it, more like private tutoring. Various people established "halls" (like a boarding house) around the Church of St Mary the Virgin. Students were between 12 and 15 years old, they drank, they gambled and as the untrained hall owners did the teaching they didn't learn much. Little changed much until 1170 when King Henry II demanded that all English students at the Sorbonne should return to England as he was concerned about a brain drain. Oxford was the only established place of study for them to return to.

In 1196, the first account of these academic halls was written by Geoffrey of Monmouth; he was a prominent intellect of the day and had visited Oxford to present three lectures on law. The Academics met in the largest building in the town, the Church; from here proper lectures were run. Cambridge University is the Oxbridge junior partner, having been formed by breakaway Oxford students in 1208; the town and gown had fought what might be described as running scuffles hence the exodus.

In 1249, Oxford's first college, University College, was set up under the will of William of Durham, Bishop of Rouen. He left a sum of money in his will to provide a building to house free education for 12 young clerics. Balliol was founded in 1263. For the last 200 years Balliol has been famous due to their clever and reforming Master, Benjamin Jowett, who wanted to enhance the reputation of Balliol in the country. He succeeded so well in this that in 1900 no fewer than 40 Members of the House of Commons were from the college. Indeed the College has produced three prime ministers, and many other prominent politicians, as well as overseas leaders of British Imperial territories.

Merton, founded in 1264, was the first college to have legal statutes. These are written regulations now copied by most colleges; they give them their independence. They could leave Oxford at any time and still be higher education establishments. The University is an umbrella organisation of colleges which does cause administration and financial tensions from time to time.

New College looks like a monastery. This is no coincidence, because in the early days all students were taught more or less the same as monks. The only difference was that the students came out, but the monks stayed in! This was the first college to have a quadrangle with a lawn in the middle, now copied by most.

William of Wykeham founded Winchester College, and this was the first one to house both students and fellows. He also founded Winchester School, to be a feeder for the College.

Lincoln College had been founded in 1427 by the Bishop of Lincoln. Before the Reformation Oxford was in the diocese of Lincoln. Being so far from Oxford, the Bishop rarely went there, and radical Oxford students (known as Lollards), wanted to abolish Bishops. They wanted the Mass to be in the open rather than behind the rood screen, and they wanted the Bible to be in English rather than Latin. The Bishop needed the new college to train students to oppose these radicals, which by an amalgamation of local churches it did. The Methodist John Wesley was later a fellow there.

The Bodleian Library was opened in 1602, funded by Sir Thomas Bodley. He was a rich man and gave enough money for it to be built, but in addition he persuaded the authorities that a free copy of every book published in Britain should henceforth be sent to the Library. This was enshrined in law and remains to this day. Cambridge University and the British Library later obtained the same privilege. It recently received its twelve millionth books. Before the building of the library there were so few books (due their cost) that teaching and examination was fundamentally oral. The Bodlian is the biggest university library in the world, in total, in the centre of Oxford there are more books than in any city in the world, over fifteen million.

King Henry VI and Henry Chichele founded All Souls in 1438. It has a quasi Civil Service training school; it has no students, just academic fellows. It is famous for having an exclusive dinner, the Mallard Dinner, just once every 100 years, on the 14th January on the first year of every century.

Magdalen Tower, is the tallest building in Oxford. At 6 am on the 1st May each year choristers from Magdalen College School climb to the top of the tower to sing Latin anthems to welcome in the new summer.

Oxford is not just about universities, there are also famous pubs. The Bear dates back to 1242, the Kings Arms is another old one, the Turl, the Eagle & Child, the Lamb & Flag, and many more, which are well supported by town and gown alike.

Other well-known buildings include the Great Hall of Christchurch, used for the dining hall in the Harry Potter films. The College has educated 13 Prime Ministers. It was founded in 1548 by Henry VIII as part of his newly reorganised Church of England. Probably the most famous person associated with Christchurch was Charles Dodgson. He was firstly a student, then a lecturer in logic and mathematics at the College. He befriended Dean Liddle, and in 1863 took the Dean's three children out on a boat. This resulted in him writing "Alice in Wonderland" and other books under the pen name of Lewis Carroll.

Another famous person at Oxford was John Radcliffe. He was at University College and became a respected and wealthy physician. When he died he left a vast fortune that was used to build the Radcliffe Observatory, The Radcliffe Infirmary ( the first hospital in Oxford) and the Radcliffe Camera. This latter is the Country's first purely Science Library. The Sheldonian Theatre (the first building erected by Christopher Wren, who was initially a professor of geometry and astronomy at Oxford) stored part of the Bodleian's collection for some time.

In the eighteenth century students being sons of the aristocrats didn't do a great deal of work, but brought their horses to go hunting and regarded college as a rather nice hotel. Edward Gibbon the historian and writer used to say that his years at Oxford were the most idle and unprofitable of his life.

The Clarendon Building, designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor was built to house the Oxford University Press, and became yet another part of the Bodleian Library. The Natural History Museum was a mixture of lecture rooms, a museum and chemistry laboratories. It was here that a famous evolution debate took place in 1860 between the Bishop of Oxford, Samuel Wilberforce and Thomas Huxley about Darwin's theories. There are more religious buildings in Oxford than in any other town or city in England. Christchurch is a cathedral and every college has a chapel.

From a sporting point of view Oxonians have won over 70 Olympic gold, 60 silver and 50 bronze medals and of course Roger Bannister ran the first sub-four minute mile at the Oxford University running track in 1954.

No women were allowed to study at Oxford until Lady Margaret Hall and Somerville College were founded in 1879. Even then they could only attend lectures with a chaperone, and were not allowed to sit for a degree. The First World War changed so many things, but it wasn't until the 1970s that most colleges became co-educational.

Exeter College was the first of the all-male colleges to elect a woman Marilyn Butler as its Rector in 1993. Margaret Thatcher was the most famous student of Somerville College.

Another celebrated building in Oxford is the Ashmolean Museum. This is the only museum outside London to get over a million visitors a year. It is the oldest museum in the world. In 1683 Elias Ashmole gave his cabinet of curiosities and artwork to the University of Oxford. The museum has been greatly enlarged over the years and includes many other collections, mostly of fine art and archaeology. Canterbury Quad in St. John's College was commissioned by Archbishop William Laud in 1634. He wrote the Laudian Code of rules and rituals which governed church worship for 200 years. The Martyr's Memorial situated outside Balliol College celebrates Thomas Cranmer, Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley, who were burnt at the stake in 1556. They had agreed with Henry VIII's reformation, but Queen Mary wished for a return to Roman Catholic beliefs, and had them killed. Blackwell's bookshop is synonymous with Oxford since the 1860's.

Currently in the news is the fate of a statue of Cecil Rhodes in Oriel College. A group of students wanted it removed on the grounds that he was a racist, but it has just been decided that it should stay, as many former students had threatened to withdraw bequests to the College. Rhodes left a legacy which is used to fund the brightest students from around the globe gaining an Oxford education, one of the most famous, President Bill Clinton.

#### **4. Forthcoming Meetings**

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| February 24 <sup>th</sup> | "The 1948 London Olympics, its impact then and now"                                      |
| March 30 <sup>th</sup>    | "Out of Tragedy came forth liberation" - civilian and military evacuation in World War 2 |
| April 27 <sup>th</sup>    | "The Mary Rose, a window into Tudor life at sea"   |