

MINUTES OF THE 89th MEETING OF AYNHO HISTORY SOCIETY HELD AT THE VILLAGE HALL, AYNHO ON WEDNESDAY 29th JUNE 2016

Present: - Keith McClellan – in the Chair
Peter Cole – Secretary

Secretary's Report

Peter said that his Exhibition at both the Village Hall and the Church Fete had gone very well. He had also given two more village tours, one to seven related local members of the Secull family. He had specially wanted to show them the icehouse, as it was extremely likely that their forebears had built it.

“Beer, Sausages & Marmalade – A History of Oxford Foods”

Oxford was and still is famous for three things all derived from the 1800s; Oxford beer, Oxford sausages and Oxford marmalade.

At that time beer was much safer than water to drink, and better for people than spirits. By 1875 there were nine major breweries in Oxford. Many colleges had their own brew houses, and there was also one at the Radcliffe Infirmary. Patients had a pint and a half of weak beer a day, and staff had a slightly stronger brew.

Oxford expanded rapidly in the Victorian era, the population doubling between 1851 and 1901. The demand for beer increased during the second half of the century, a map of 1883 showed 319 licenced premises in the city. There was one for every 130 people at that time.

By the late 19th century there were four main breweries in the St Thomas's area: The Eagle, Phillip's Tower, The Lion & The Swan.

The Eagle had been owned by the Tawney family, who built a large house in that area. The family was after some time bought out by the Morrell family who owned The Lion, and who were to remain one of the famous Oxford brewing families for over 200 years. The Morrell's went on to build Headington Hill Hall.

The Swan brewery was owned originally by Sir John Treacher, but he sold it to William Hall. This family built the business up until they owned all the other breweries apart from Morrell's. Most of the men in the families mentioned so far were philanthropists, and served as mayors or even M.P.s. Eventually Hall's was taken over by Allsops and later Ind Coop. Morrell's continued until 1998.

Being fairly central in the country gave Oxford some importance as a market town. Bacon was produced in large quantities, and an immense number of Irish pigs were driven here from the Bristol docks. Originally cattle and pigs were walked, but later they travelled by train. The trade directory of 1852 lists 50 butchers when the population was 28,000, but fifty years later when the population was about 50,000 there were 80 independent butchers. The Oxford sausage came about in the mid-18th century when a Mrs Dorothy Spreadbury started to make them out of a mixture of pork and veal, highly seasoned with lemon, herbs and spices; then formed into a crescent shape. In a few years' time the Oxford sausage was being produced by a number of local butchers. It became really well-known when Mrs Beeton chose it as the ideal sausage in her 1861 Book of Household Management. With the huge popularity of this

book the Oxford sausage reached a much bigger audience, and many more local butchers began to devise their own versions.

Clark's made "Real" Oxford Sausages, Charles Gee made "Celebrated" ones and John Wiblin made "Royal" Oxford Sausages. Leonard Henry Alden, (who became a Mayor of Oxford) and his family had at least six butcher's shops in the covered market at one time or another. Leonard's shop was once described as the biggest butcher's shop in the country. It is now in its 7th generation.

Many butchers slaughtered their animals in a room behind the shop but in the early 1880s Nicholas Hughes, who also had a butcher's shop in the covered market, found that demand for his sausages was such that he built a special sausage factory in east Oxford. Hughes made a lot of money supplying his sausages in tins to soldiers in the Boer War, so he was able to retire early and sell his business to Ernest Pigott in 1905.

Like most thriving towns, with the advent of the canal soon followed by the railway and better roads, grocers flourished in Oxford. Display and advertising became more important, and shoppers could browse many items and their prices rather than just asking the grocer what he had in stock.

One of these grocers who began trading in the early Victorian period was Francis Cooper. His shop was on the High Street He described himself as an Italian warehouseman, as foreign traders were considered to be very fashionable at that time. He dealt not just with groceries, but with wines, spirit and liqueurs. His shop sign mentioned that he was a purveyor to the Prince of Wales and the Crown Prince of Denmark (not mentioning that both were Oxford students who occasionally popped in to buy items).

His son Frank inherited the business in 1867. Seven years later his wife Sarah made 36 pounds of marmalade to her secret recipe, and what the family couldn't eat was sold in the shop. The strong-tasting marmalade proved so popular that they went into commercial production, and her husband cannily named it the Oxford Marmalade. Sarah and her marmalade are commemorated with a blue plaque on the building. In 1902 they moved to new, larger premises on Park End Street. This had shops on the ground floor and a new factory on the three floors above, with a sugar room, a cutting room, a boiling room, a settling room, a packing room and store. This was right opposite the two Oxford stations, so sugar and oranges would be sent in by train. Up to sixty workers were employed there.

Frank produced a Tourist Guide to Oxford, which featured his new building on the first page. Chapter three is entitled "Gastronomic Oxford", and has a very brief mention of the Oxford Sausage, followed by many pages about his marmalade and how it was made, nothing like a bit of self-promotion!

Forthcoming meetings

July & August

No meetings

Wednesday 28th September **Meeting at Aynhoe Park – a guided tour with comparison to the early tours conducted by the Cartwrights post World War 2**