

THE 111th MEETING OF AYNHO HISTORY SOCIETY HELD AT THE VILLAGE HALL, AYNHO
ON WEDNESDAY 30th JANUARY 2019

Present:- Keith McClellan – Chairman
Peter Cole – Secretary

Keith announced that cards had been produced for all members giving details of speakers for the year.

Peter said that he had finally received full details of the finances for the earlier part of 2017 from Rupert, so he would soon be able to complete the accounts for 2017 and 2018.

- 1.) Keith introduced Stephen Wass who had visited us at our AGM in November 2016 to talk about his discoveries on archaeological investigations at Hanwell Castle and Farnborough Hall. Tonight he is going to update us on further discoveries at the Hall site.

Stephen started by pointing out that all the land he would be talking about is owned by The National Trust. The first thing he tries to do is to find out why people chose to live where they did. You can see different layers of history.

Farnborough is a small village just over the border into Warwickshire, about five miles from Banbury. There is a mixture of high land, low land, valleys, with access to water, just the things that are needed for a settlement. In 2013 we found a large amount of tiny flint pieces. This was a clear indication of flint working at least 10,000 years ago. These would have been hunter gatherers.

The next finds were hand-made Saxon pottery.

Then there was a problem because it appears that the Church is surrounded on three sides by completely open land. We asked the National Trust if we could investigate this, and it turned out that there had been a huge barn there, probably from about 1400, but it was pulled down around 1980, most likely because the rich owner didn't want an old barn spoiling his nice view. That is where the pottery came from.

Lower down there had been a rectangular platform, surrounded by a shallow dry ditch. This was because it was very popular in the seventeenth century to have a moat around your garden as a status symbol to show that you had really arrived. However we found that it had been carefully dismantled to be re-used elsewhere, and a "sleeper" wall erected to support a timber-framed building there.

Water was very important. A moat would not only look good, but it could be used to help with drainage and disposal of sewage. Fish farming took place in order to provide a plentiful source of food, and there were often several such ponds.

At Farnborough the road from Banbury goes right through the estate. On the other side of the road is a little valley which has a series of rectangular ponds, and uniquely this is surrounded by a high wall, and there is an earthwork which goes all round the perimeter like a causeway. It is a classic Tudor/Stuart enclosure. There is an octagonal walled garden from about 1820.

We suspect that early on in the 16th century the owner decided to have a better building. The present Farnborough Hall was built in the late 17th/early 18th century. The wall between the hall and the dining room is three feet thick. The reason for this is that the new building was built over the old one.

Going back to the Church on top of the hill, there is a wall all around, and in the wall is St. Botolph's Well (the Church is St. Botolph's). The holy well flows out on the outside of the wall, but all the fastenings are on the inside of the wall.

There are mill ponds, so water is being used for power here, and there are large bodies of ornamental water.

We now move forward for a hundred years to midway through the 18th century. There has been a

massive transformation of the landscape. The Manor is now held by the Raleigh family, who had lost a great deal of money in the Civil War. The Holbech family held a mortgage on the property so they took over and cleared the debts. There was a big rebuild transforming the house to what it is today.

William Holbech had fallen in love, but was spurned so he went off to Italy for ten years. When he came back he had an obsession with Roman statues, portrait busts, temples and obelisks.

One of the things he built was an amphitheatre. This was not unusual in gardens of the 18th century. One would walk to enjoy the view. Looking from the north there is a ha-ha. Saloman's Pool is there. All you can actually see is trees, but if you could look through them they have taken a slice off the top of a hill, and they have built a huge bank of earth behind it. This became very overgrown, but recently a good deal has been cleared. Another enormous object is the Oval Pool. It has a curving dam across it, which occupies nearly three quarters of it. In its heyday it would have been an extraordinary experience to walk across it. It just so happens that the shape and size of the Oval Pool almost exactly mirrors the ancient Coliseum in Rome. Water comes down from surrounding hills to Saloman's Pool. Then there is a new body of water called the River and Canal with a Cascade. As this drops down with a series of steps they start very steep but become shallower, so that at the bottom the water is no more than four millimeters deep, so you can actually walk on water. People went boating, angling, wildfowling and swimming, but it is clear that all this area is old and likely to disappear altogether eventually. There is a scrapbook filled with accounts of horse racing, prize-fighting, etc. The architect for all this was Sanderson Miller.

In the second half of the 18th century part of the estate was turned into an ornamental farm. This was to show off what a sound economic head you have on your shoulder. You are showing a landscape which is not only attractive, but also productive.

There is a wonderful walled garden, which is not open to the public, which has what is called the Snob's tunnel – a way for the servants to get produce from the garden to the house without being seen.

In the 20th century in the middle of the amphitheatre we found some old camp fire sites. There was also a tree on the edge of the Cascade, now cut down, which had the names of three early rock and roll musicians carved on it: Duane Eddy, Eddie Cochran, and Cliff Richard. Eddie had died in 1960, and it may have been the work of a grieving fan. Finally the walled garden was abandoned, but in one corner is the remains of an apple store. In the far corner of this can still be seen some old wine and sherry bottles etc. from what used to be a teen-aged drinking den in the 1970s. Stephen has given this talk several times, and on one of them a gentleman came up to him afterwards and confessed that he had been at the den and was amazed that it had become a part of history.

Keith thanked Stephen for a fascinating talk.

2.) Forthcoming Meetings: -

Wednesday 27th February - The History of Privys by Chris Bazeley

Wednesday 27th March - Romantic Decline - Preserving Chastleton House by Ruth Peters

Wednesday 24th April – The Sheep That Eat Men by Martin Sirot-Smith (in costume)