

### Membership Renewal

Membership renewal forms were sent out in March, prior to the AGM. If you have not yet renewed your membership, you will have received a note with this newsletter to say that it will lapse at the end of June. You will then cease to receive newsletters and other communications. We do hope you find something of interest in our programme and decide to join us for another year.

### **'We are Fred Karno's Army'** **Ron Smedley** **Meeting Report by Graham Driver**



After completion of the formal business at the AGM on 7 April 2011, an informative talk, 'We are Fred Karno's Army' was given by Ron Smedley, Chairman of the Hampton Riverside Trust. The talk was vividly illustrated with slides and film clips which gave a fascinating insight into the life and times of Fred Karno.

Frederick John Westcott (later Fred Karno) was born in Exeter in 1866. Apprenticed at an early age to a plumber in Nottingham, he dreamed of becoming an entertainer. When the plumber died, he joined an act as an acrobat and began

to work in circuses. In between engagements he and other performers busked on the London streets and one of his favourite spots was Molesey Lock, which was always crowded with boats on sunny weekends. He saw the magnificent houseboats moored across the water and he vowed then that when he became rich he would have a houseboat on Tagg's Island.

His career took off when a troupe known as The Three Carnos failed to turn up at a London theatre, and Fred and two friends did an act in their stead. This was so successful that they were kept on, and Fred adopted the act as his own, taking the name Fred Karno. Soon he began producing his own shows, and he proved an astute judge of talent in recruiting artists for his troupe. Many famous comedians started their careers working for Fred Karno. Names such as Charlie Chaplin, Stan Laurel, Will Hay, Max Miller, Harry Lauder and the Crazy Gang evoked many memories for the AGM audience.

Fred became a rich man and in 1903 was able to buy the houseboat 'Highland Lassie' on Tagg's Island. He came to feel that it was not magnificent enough and in 1912 he had the luxurious houseboat 'Astoria' built, at a cost of £20,000. He then bought Tagg's Island and built a luxurious hotel there, the Karsino, which opened its doors in 1913. Fred was not an efficient hotelier and the hotel began to lose money. After 1918 the public began to demand more sophisticated entertainment, and cinema became popular. Fred was in financial difficulty and was made bankrupt in 1926. After this the hotel changed hands several times and was finally demolished in 1972. The 'Astoria' remains moored on the Hampton side of the Thames near Garrick's Villa and is now used as a recording studio.

After his bankruptcy Fred had mixed fortunes, including a difficult six months in America. He produced a successful touring show, but the Fred Karno Film Company was a failure. Finally he ran an off-licence in Dorset and died in 1941.

## **Henry VIII - The Making of a Tyrant Suzannah Lipscomb Meeting Report by Jenni Haile**

On the 475<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the execution of Anne Boleyn, Thursday 19 May 2011, a large group of us met on a beautiful warm, sunny evening at Hampton Court Palace, to hear Suzannah Lipscomb give a talk entitled 'Henry VIII - The Making of a Tyrant'.

After a very enjoyable social gathering in the Clore Centre, we made our way upstairs to the Weston Room to hear Suzannah's talk. Suzannah lectures at the University of East Anglia in Early Modern History, having previously worked at Hampton Court as a Curator.



**Dr Suzannah Lipscomb with Jenny Wood,  
MLHS Chairman**

We were told that Hampton Court was a palace of pleasure. Imagine an enormous swathe of land stretching across Molesey, Esher, Weybridge and beyond, used as the King's hunting ground, filled with deer for the chase; visualize fabulous palaces such as Oatlands and Nonsuch!

Suzannah's book, entitled '1536 The Year that Changed Henry VIII' was the basis of her talk. She put forward the theory that the events of 1536 changed Henry from a fun-loving, handsome, friendly young man into a despotic old tyrant, which is how he is best remembered. When he came to the throne in 1509, he was a great sportsman, he spoke many languages, he was friendly, warm, benevolent and great fun. Henry had been described as the 'handsomest face in all the world'.

At the beginning of January 1536 Katherine of Aragon died and later that month Henry had a serious jousting accident. He fell from his horse

and was unconscious for two hours. The fall probably also caused an ulcer on his leg to burst open and this never healed. This put paid to a lot of his athletic activities and, not being able to exercise, he started to put on weight. In 1536 Henry's had a waist measurement of 37 inches. Five years later his waist measured 54 inches.

The Queen, Anne Boleyn, miscarried a baby boy a few days after Henry's jousting accident. A few months later, Henry's only son, the illegitimate Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Richmond and Somerset, died aged 17, whom, Suzannah suggested, Henry had been thinking of naming as his heir. The loss of two male heirs, together with the later accusation of Anne's adultery and incest, must have been a bitter blow for Henry. In 1536 he turned 45, which at that time was considered to be the beginning of old age

It was very interesting to hear that rumours about Anne's affairs had begun with one Elizabeth Brown accused of loose living. To deflect these accusations, her reply seems to have been "Well you should see the Queen then". Elizabeth's brother apparently took this news to Cromwell who told the King. Cromwell was told by the King that he would die if it wasn't true. Suzannah wondered how much Cromwell was determined that Anne, along with her supposed lovers, should die, guilty or not, to save his own neck. A wife's adultery implied a lack of manliness for a husband, even more so for a King, and Anne had said Henry wasn't much good in bed. Another blow for his morale. Henry was very concerned about the planning of Anne's execution and paid the vast sum of £23 6s 8d for a French executioner from Calais who used a sword to behead Anne as she knelt. The royal painter Hans Holbein only received a salary of £30 a year.

Henry's portrait painted by Hans Holbein shows the King in his most familiar pose. Imposing, determined chin, steely eyes and very masculine with the outsize cod piece to show what he was made of! A powerful King. 1536 bought the dissolution of the monasteries, and with it riots in the North of England by the Pilgrims of Grace against Henry VIII.

Henry married Jane Seymour but, wondered Suzannah, had he originally meant to fall in love with her, or was it just 'Courtly Love', a sort of chivalric game played out at court, where the men admired and courted the ladies from afar? Jane Seymour died shortly after childbirth in 1537. Yet another bitter blow for Henry.

At the end of the talk, some very interesting questions were asked by members. As well as Suzannah's theory that events and circumstances started to change Henry VIII in 1536 (and more people are starting to take note of this), could something physical have any bearing on his change? For instance might he have suffered bruising to his cerebral cortex when he fell from his horse at the joust? Could this have affected his whole personality as has been proven in recent tests with violent criminals?

Did he have gastric problems? If he ate a meat rich diet could he possibly have got CJD? When his son was born, did this not cheer him up? Probably said Suzannah, but you would really need at least two sons - an adult heir and a spare, as she put it.

A very enjoyable and informative evening, a big thank you to everyone involved.

**Summer Stroll**  
**Island Barn Reservoir**  
**Tuesday 21 June 2011, from 6.45 pm**  
**Talk by Tony Osborne at 8 pm**  
**Chandlers Field School**  
**High Street, West Molesey, KT8 2LX**

This year's Summer Stroll will celebrate the centenary of the opening of Island Barn Reservoir. We are fortunate that once again Tony Osborne has organised the evening for us, and that Matt Prior, Recreation Manager for Thames Water, will meet walkers at the reservoir and then later at Chandlers Field. This is a rare and special opportunity to get a closer look at Island Barn and to learn about its origins and history.

Maps for walkers will be available from 6.45 to 7.30 at Chandlers Field. The walk should take around 30 minutes and involves around 50 steps up to the Reservoir. It is difficult to be exact about timing, as it depends on when walkers return, but we aim to start the talk by Tony Osborne at Chandlers Field at around 8-8.15. For those who do not wish to walk, refreshments will be served from 7.30.

**Claremont House Tour and Talk**  
**Portsmouth Road, Esher, Surrey KT10 9JG**  
**Thursday 8 September 2011, 7.30 pm**

Our September meeting takes place at Claremont House in Esher. Further details will follow in the next newsletter. The tour does not include the Belvedere, so you may be interested in the details given below about opportunities to visit the Belvedere throughout the summer.

**Molesey Carnival Through The Ages**  
**Wednesday 16th November 2011**  
**Imber Court East Molesey KT8 0BT**

We are currently researching for our meeting in November on the history of Molesey Carnival. If anyone has any photos, memories or information which they would be prepared to share with us, or if anyone would like to join the research group preparing for this meeting, will they please contact 020 8979 0059 or 020 8979 7556.

Claire Annable is making some bunting for the Carnival meeting, and would be pleased to receive scraps of material (about the size of A4 paper and larger) (224 Walton Road).

### **Can you hear me?**

It is disappointing to receive complaints following a meeting that it has been difficult for members to hear the speaker. We do have a PA system, and we would ask any member having difficulty hearing the speaker to please interrupt, so that there is an opportunity to correct the problem.

### **Heritage Board**

You may be aware of the Community Heritage Initiative Project, conducted by Elmbridge Council in 2006, on the Old Village and Bridge Road Conservation Areas. One of the outcomes of this appraisal was an appreciation of the importance of the river views from the Esher Road bridges, and of the public open space opposite the Police Station, and recognition of the heritage of the Conservation Areas. The proposals included a heritage board, to be situated on the Police Station green, to draw attention to the surrounding historical features and to the rivers. Members of MLHS committee worked on the content of the proposed board, and we are pleased to say that EBC are planning to install it later this year.

**P J Dale**

One of our members, Paul Cunningham, of the butchers P J Dale in Bridge Road, is researching the history of the shop. He would be interested to hear from anyone who has any information about previous proprietors or memories of shopping there in the past. ([paulcunningham59@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:paulcunningham59@hotmail.co.uk) 020 8979 3800).

**Hampton Court Palace Roof Tours  
(2 June - 18 August 2011)**

**See Hampton Court Palace as you've never seen it before!  
Alternate Thursdays during June, July and August 2011 at 11.00 am  
Tickets £35**

*Hampton Court Palace at your feet, or rather beneath them. View the intricate brickwork of the famous chimneys up close, look down on the courtyards and apartments that make up the Tudor and Baroque Palaces and take in the views across the gardens and estate.*

*Previously only available to HRP Members, the tour is hosted by one of the State Apartment Warders and lasts for approximately one and a half hours.*

**Painshill Park, Cobham  
Thursday 7 July 2011  
Free Lunchtime Talk: *The River Mole* by Ron Musk**

*The Mole, which is about 50 miles long, is important in ecological and environmental terms and its catchment area includes twelve sites of special scientific interest (SSSI), a Local Nature Reserve and a Special Area of Conservation.*

*The source of the river is in West Sussex near Gatwick but much of its course is in Surrey as it wends its way through attractive countryside to join the River Thames near Hampton Court Palace. This talk will outline the history of the river and look at various locations along its route.  
**Free 30 minute lunchtime talk at 1 pm.***

**Admission charges apply if you also wish to visit the landscape garden.**

**Garrick's Temple, Hampton  
Sunday 3 July and Sunday 7 August 2011 at 3 pm  
Shakespeare on Sunday**

*Sonnets, soliloquies and scenes from Shakespeare performed by professional actors from ARC: (the Actors' Richmond Circle) and Hammersmith Equity.*

**Claremont Landscape Garden – Portsmouth Road  
Belvedere Tower  
First weekends of the month May to October 2011**

*This is an exciting opportunity to visit one of the oldest buildings on the Claremont estate dating from 1715. It was designed by Sir John Vanbrugh for the Duke of Newcastle. Today the Belvedere Tower is owned by Claremont Fan Court School who kindly allow it to be shown to the public on the first full weekend of every month between May and October. Free entry to the tower, but normal admission charges to the garden apply.*

**More Information:** Property Office, 01372 467806