

Next Meeting

Imber Court – A Stately Home for Horses
Talk by Chris Forester
Tuesday 31 January 8 pm (doors open 7.30)
Imber Court, Ember Lane KT8 0BT

Chris Forester started his career in the Metropolitan Police in May 1972. After some three years patrolling the streets of Paddington he opted to join the prestigious Mounted Branch. Within three years he had been promoted to Sergeant and in 1980 he was posted to Imber Court Mounted Training Establishment as part of the training staff. It was at this location and in 1984 that he founded the Mounted Branch Museum. Now retired, Chris gives lectures on Police and Military History whilst continuing his studies of these subjects.

At our last meeting at Imber Court parking was difficult. You may wish to arrange lifts with other members to minimise the number of cars.

Meeting Reports

The Barn Theatre Club
'Lifeboat'
Wednesday 31 August
Report by Jill Wilkins

The Society's members were invited to the first night of the performance of 'Lifeboat', a short play about two child evacuee survivors of the sinking of SS City of Benares, which was on its way to Canada in 1940. As part of the evening there was a presentation of film, photographs and readings to expand upon the events surrounding the evacuee programme. This presentation included some of the wartime memories of Molesey residents collected for our meeting on 'Life in Molesey during WWII' last November. We heard that one Molesey girl had volunteered to be evacuated to Canada, just by putting up her hand in school. Unfortunately, she was not treated very well and had to work very hard. Another went to Lincolnshire, where she was put into the top class, as she was ahead of the other children. Then we heard the other side of the story, from a girl who was evacuated from Vienna to Molesey, and was eternally grateful to the owners of Mildred Lodge School, who looked

The presentation set the scene for the true story of two young girls, Bess and Beth, who set sail for Canada in September 1940. We watched their excitement and apprehension as they left their families, and they revelled in the unaccustomed luxury on board. Bess and Beth became firm friends and when the ship was sunk, they spent 19 hours together clinging to an upturned lifeboat. The teenage girls were played by Laura Harrington and Jessica Hickman, who brought great poignancy to their roles. They had dreams of Hollywood stardom, whilst chanting 'There's no place like home,' to keep themselves afloat. This was a really excellent and enjoyable production, with the highlight being the performances of the young actors in the leading roles. In real life, Bess and Beth remained friends for 70 years, and Bess married Beth's brother.

The Barn Theatre Club, 70 High Street, West Molesey, KT8 2LY Telephone: 07535 738321 email: info@thebarntheatre.co.uk

Claremont House Tour and Talk
Thursday 8th September
Report by Jenny Stowell

Around 80 members descended on Claremont Fan Court School in Esher. We were given a very full and informative talk by Pamela Rider who teaches at the school.

The first house was built by Sir John Vanburgh in 1708, in front of where the present house stands. In 1714 he sold it on to the Whig politician Thomas Pelham-Hollis, Earl of Clare, who aptly named it Claremont, thus explaining its present day name. As well as enlarging the house, he had the Belvedere Tower built.

When he died in 1768, owing large sums of money, his widow sold the estate to Lord Clive of India, who demolished the house and then commissioned Capability Brown to design and build a new Palladian style mansion in its place and also to revamp the gardens. Clive sadly committed suicide in 1786, never actually having lived in the house.

The estate had several owners after Lord Clive's death, before the government bought it in 1816 as a wedding present for George IV's

daughter Princess Charlotte upon her marriage to Prince Leopold. Sadly she died at Claremont, after giving birth to a stillborn daughter. Leopold later became King of Belgium. He allowed his niece, Queen Victoria, to use the house both as a child, and later as a wife and mother with Albert and their children.

In due course Victoria bought the estate for her youngest son Leopold, upon his marriage to Princess Helen. On Leopold's death, it should have passed to his son Charles but, as by now he had become Duke of Saxe-Coburg and a German citizen, the government disallowed the inheritance and the estate was sold.

After several owners, in 1931 it was purchased for use as a school for the children of Christian Science families but, during the War, the children were evacuated and the building was used to house the design team for the Hawker Siddeley Company. It was at Claremont that Sidney Camm designed the famous Hawker Tempest fighter plane. Much hilarity was caused during their stay by a notice in their bedrooms, which read "If you require a mistress in the night, please ring the bell." After the War the house reverted back to a school and in 1968 it became amalgamated with Fan Court School, hence the name. Today it caters for some 600 pupils between the ages of 3 and 18.

**It's Carnival Time!
Wednesday 16 November**

Indeed it was, as we were treated to a stunning array of photographs, films, press cuttings and information about Molesey's carnivals, sports and fund-raising dating back to the turn of the century. Anthony Barnes gave us a fascinating insight into how the early collections and parades for the Molesey cottage hospital developed into a carnival tradition that became an essential date in the social calendar for Molesey residents. The first of the modern carnivals took place on the cricket field in 1931 and a handful of members in the audience could remember carnivals being held here before the carnival ground moved to Cigarette Island behind Hampton Court Station in 1939. It was a delight to see pictures of past carnival queens and celebrities who opened the festivities. We watched a Pathé newsreel film from 1938 of the swimsuit competition at the Upper Deck Swimming Pool to choose a Lady Godiva to ride in the procession - an event which sparked a mild controversy! The carnival was revived after the War and was run by St John Ambulance Brigade from 1952-58. The

Divisional Superintendent, Fred Witch, who chaired the carnival committee for those years, managed to attend the evening and was greeted with a round of applause! It was impossible to do justice to all the people in the audience who over the years have given their time and energy to the carnivals. Molesey Football Club revived the carnival tradition on their ground briefly in the 1960s. Clive Kirk brought us up-to-date with the history of Molesey carnival since its revival in 1977. He helped organise the carnival that was held on West Molesey Recreation Ground to celebrate the Queen's Silver Jubilee. He told us that the carnival committee had intended to hold the carnival for one year only! The rest, as they say, is history! We watched a film of the 1979 carnival which produced many an excited outburst - 'That's me, I was only 5' and 'Oh, look! There's Uncle George'. There was time afterwards to look at the slide shows and posters. For those who missed the evening, and for those who attended, the Society will be writing a longer article for the website. Thanks to everyone who provided photographs and information, and of course to the organisers for all their research and efforts in putting together a really interesting event.

**Magical Molesey
'Molesey Makes Merry' - Carnival to 1964
Thursday 24 November
Report by Paula Day**

Once again Tudor & Co invited us to welcome members and shoppers to partake in mulled wine and mince pies, and see some of the highlights from our Carnival event. The weather was kind, unlike the previous year, and the whole evening was really well supported, with the pavements packed with visitors, many of whom came in to Tudor & Co to look at a display of photographs of the early Carnivals entitled 'Molesey Makes Merry' and to rest their feet while watching film of the 1949 Carnival procession going from Weston Avenue, down Walton Road and Bridge Road to Cigarette Island. One of the floats in the procession that year was the tableau entered by the RAF mounted on a 60 foot trailer depicting the Berlin airlift - the tableau included equipment used on the aircraft and several big scale models of York aircraft, and it was manned by pilots and staff who had taken part in the operations. The film showed several shots of that tableau. Thank you to Tudor & Co, and to everyone who supported the Society that evening.

Molesey during WWII
Exhibition at Molesey Royal British Legion
St Mary's Road, East Molesey KT8 0ST
Friday 9 March/Saturday 10 March

Many members who attended our meeting on Molesey during WWII in November 2010 mentioned that they would like an opportunity to have more time to look at the photographs, interview scripts and other material on display that evening. We will therefore be holding an exhibition opening on Friday 9 March and Saturday 10 March. Provisional times are 3 – 8pm on Friday and 10 – 3pm on Saturday. We will contact you by email nearer the date when the times are confirmed. There will also be posters displayed in the Library and the British Legion, and other locations in Molesey, as well as publicity in the local press.

Sport on the Hurst

As many of you know, Molesey Hurst has long been associated with a variety of sports and so to coincide with this year's Olympic Games our main topic of research this year will be Sport on the Hurst. It seems sensible to start early on this project as we know that there will be a lot of material available. We would love members to come forward who would be willing to help us with the research. It is not necessary to make a huge commitment, as we should be grateful to anyone who comes forward to research even the smallest area of this topic. If you would like to be involved please contact Pauline Sieler on 020 8979 7556

People and Buildings Group

The People and Buildings group is a small group of interested members who meet informally every two months to talk about different aspects of Molesey's past. We take a particular interest in what life was like for people who lived here in the past and how their surroundings have changed. Our next get together is 8pm on Wednesday 25th January, upstairs in the British Legion.

The Village Lock Up

Tony Osborne has been looking at the history of the old Bridge Road area. He has vague memories from the 1950s of the old village Lock Up at the end of Bridge Gardens (where the two garages in Banana Island are now). Rowland Baker refers to it in his 'dictionary'. Tony would be interested to know if any other members recall it or even have a photo of it. Please let us know if you have any information, and Tony might be able to include it in one of his wonderful Summer Strolls.

The 'Molesey Shield'



A three thousand year old shield, first found in 1864 on the bed of the River Thames but which became lost after some years, has just been rediscovered.

The circular bronze shield is 64 cm in diameter. Its centre features a dome shaped 'boss', to allow space for the warrior's hand, around which are eleven circular rings of ornate punched dimples. It is a superb example of the height of expertise in Bronze Age craftsmanship in Britain.

It had last been known of in the ownership of a local resident, Mr. James Milner of Palace Road. He had kept it safely until at least 1868, but more likely until 1882, and during those years he proudly displayed it at prestigious national locations. However, after it left Molesey it became untraceable. The shield was to all intents and purposes lost, despite efforts by various organizations and specialists to find it.

Seven years ago, two MLHS members, Paul Gossage and Steven Baker, resolved to track it down. At that stage, the little they knew about it was from the 'Book of Molesey' (by the late Rowland Baker who was Steven's father) in which there is an illustration and some text saying that the shield was found in the river Thames at Molesey. Intrigued as to its whereabouts they made enquiries with the authorities, which showed only two known documentary references to it. The first was a feature article in a prestigious antiquarian magazine of the era, and the second was when it was displayed at the London premises of the eminent Society of Antiquaries in 1867.

So they embarked on a fresh search which included researching the entire family tree of the Milners who lived in Molesey until 1910, obtaining wills of the Milners, internet links across the world with relatives of the Milners,

searching old newspaper records and contacting owners of obscure private collections by antiquarians who had connections with the shield.

Two years ago the British Museum put Paul and Steven in contact with Bronze Age archaeologist Marion Uckelmann. She had just finished a five year doctorate on all the European Bronze Age shields and is probably the leading expert in this speciality. She had been aware of the shield's existence from the documentary evidence already known, and was also intrigued as to its whereabouts or whether or not it was still anywhere to be found.

Steven then unearthed a previously unknown record of the shield being displayed in 1868 at the Leeds National Exhibition of Works of Art. This later led to the discovery (by researcher Janice Phelps) of documentary proof of the shield returning back home to Molesey. But there the search came to another standstill for a year.

Then Paul and Steven decided to ask Surrey Archaeological Society to do an in depth search of their extensive archives. Their librarian, Hannah Jeffery, combed through all their records and pieced together three clues in an obscure document. Hannah realized that she had discovered a similar sounding shield, found near to where the missing shield had been discovered (this is described in the earliest documentary records as "between Hampton and Walton"). This similar sounding shield had then gone on to a private collection in Dorset belonging to a man called Pitt Rivers. Hannah passed on her vital information to Paul and Steven who passed it on to Marion, who immediately said it all "clicked".

With her extensive knowledge of all the European Bronze age shields, Marion realized that the missing shield is one which is now currently in the Hunt Museum in Ireland. That shield had been bought from the Pitt Rivers private collection in Dorset around 1970 with two other items, which had provenances linking them to separate places in north-east Ireland. Simply because the shield had been bought with these two other items, it had been assumed it came from the same area – and had been mistakenly labelled the 'Antrim Shield'.

So at last, the mystery was unravelled and the shield had been found.

Paul Gossage says: "The shield was found two miles up the river from Molesey. It was proudly displayed nationally by a Molesey man who understood its importance and kept it safe for many years. But when it left Molesey its provenance became lost for over a hundred years. It was finally rediscovered by two people from Molesey who were crucial links in a chain of just four people. So that its true provenance is recognized, I think we should now do it justice and call it the 'Molesey Shield'."

This rare and unique shield was created from a single block of bronze, forged in a fire at temperatures of 600 degrees Centigrade and then beaten ever thinner in gradual stages. It has been estimated that this process of 'heating and beating' had to be repeated at least 200 times in order to create the shield. It would have been physically demanding, but it was also painstaking and delicate craftsmanship. Such expertise was amongst the heights of the technology of the day. The creation of such an exceptional artefact shows that there would have been quite a sizeable community of people in the tribe who made it over 3,000 years ago.

From the wide range of accumulated knowledge available today, the experts believe that the shield was created for a variety of purposes during its lifetime. Firstly as a precious, beautiful and charismatic artefact in its own right. As such, it would have been carried as a symbol of power, prestige and status by a leader of the community. It is also likely that it would have been used on various ceremonial occasions. In addition, its robust design means that it was intended for battle and probably to be used only by a warrior leader. Indeed it has some damage to it, which may possibly have been inflicted in combat. However, the experts believe that the final purpose of the shield was fulfilled when it was deliberately and ceremonially laid to rest in the river as a votive offering to the gods, never to be seen by the tribe again.

Paul says: "It's been a long journey for Steven and me, but worth it to metaphorically 'bring home' our lost shield. Its physical home is definitely in Ireland, where it is magnificently displayed in pride of place in the Hunt Museum. But its spiritual home is in Molesey, as the 'Molesey Shield'."

The above is a transcript of the press release issued by Paul Gossage and Steven Baker in November 2011.