

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Wednesday 18 January 2023, 11 a.m.

COFFEE MORNING

Royal British Legion, St Mary's Road, East Molesey, KT8 0ST

Calling all lovers of local history. Our first event of the New Year is a Molesey-themed, coffee-time quiz. We'll put you in teams and explain the rules on the day (no copies of *Molesey Then and Now* or phones allowed!). We're sure you'll enjoy the answers as much as the questions.

Tuesday 7 February 2023, 8 p.m.

Talk by John Spencer

AC CARS AROUND THAMES DITTON

St Lawrence School, Church Road, East Molesey KT8 9DR

John, the AC Owners' Club archivist, will talk about AC Cars around the Thames Ditton area. His talk will include the history of the company from 1899, their five sites in the area, the work which they did on airship engines, railway trains and world championship motor cars, their activities in the World Wars including their work on Tagg's Island in the Second World War, their personnel and their major sporting achievements.

Thursday 23 March 2023, 8 p.m.

AGM followed by a talk by Celia Holman

A SLICE OF EEL PIE - BOATYARDS AND BANDS, ARTISTS & INVENTORS

St Lawrence School, Church Road, East Molesey KT8 9DR

Come and learn why this tiny island in the Thames is so famous - from its heritage working boatyards nestling side by side with the island's creative community to the significant part the erstwhile Eel Pie Island Hotel played in the 1960s British Blues explosion, helping superstars such as The Rolling Stones, Eric Clapton, David Bowie, Rod Stewart and many more kick start their musical careers. The AGM will precede Celia's talk but will be kept as short as possible.

MEETING REPORTS

THINGS YOU (PROBABLY) DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT KINGSTON

A talk by Julian McCarthy

Tuesday 13 September 2022

Report by Jenny Wood

Julian has been the chair of Kingston Tour Guides since 2020 and is the author of four books about the town. He is an engaging and lively speaker who clearly loves his subject and enjoyed sharing some of his knowledge with us. I certainly learned a lot of things about Kingston which I didn't know before. Julian gave us a huge amount of information in a short period of time and this report simply picks out a few of the things which he told us.

- Kingston was originally called 'Cyninges tun' in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles. 'Cyninges tun' was owned by the kings of Wessex and the name means 'the King's Estate'. It was first mentioned in 838 as the meeting place of King Egbert of Wessex and the Archbishop of Canterbury. It was chosen as the site of the meeting because it was halfway between Winchester and Canterbury.
- The Coronation Stone gives the names of seven Anglo-Saxon kings reputed to have been crowned in Kingston but it can only be proved that two kings were crowned there, namely Athelstan in 925 and Ethelred the Unready in 978. The earliest image that we have of a king is that of Athelstan.
- The weather-vane on the Guildhall depicts a bargee and his faithful dog, thus highlighting the importance of the river to Kingston.
- Kingston stood on a series of gravel islands between Mercia and Wessex. The River Thames in Kingston runs north-south but there also used to be an eastern arm of the Thames which was crossed by a bridge in Clarence Street. Kingston's railway bridge is built on gravel islands.
- Julian described the building in the Market Place which was formerly Boots the Chemist and is now occupied by Anthropologie as a "deceitful building". When Boots took over the property in 1909, they



The former 'Boots' building in the Market Place

erected the façade over what was previously just a brick building. Boots used the ground floor as a chemist but upstairs on the first floor was a lending library and reading room. This was the idea of Jesse Boot's wife who wanted the public to be able to read in comfort.

- Kingston's "cathedral" is the Bentall Centre. The Centre's architect, Richard Allen, had always wanted to build a cathedral and when he was asked to design the Bentall Centre he got his chance. The Centre is built in a cruciform shape with aisles, stained glass and a high vaulted ceiling. However, it is aligned north-south, not east-west as is the case for most cathedrals.
- Kingston's war memorial commemorating the men of Kingston who gave their lives in the First and Second World Wars contains the name of one lady, Ella Netta Broad, who worked at a munitions factory on Hurst Park and who died of septicaemia after cutting herself. The war memorial shows the dates of the First World War as 1914 to 1919, as the peace treaty, the Treaty of Versailles, formally ending the war was not signed until 1919.
- Surbiton racetrack on the corner of Brighton Road and Balaclava Road was the premier cycle track in the London area in the 1880s. The bikes used for racing had no brakes.
- Nipper, the HMV dog (shown right), who died in 1895, is buried in Kingston at the back of Lloyds Bank in Clarence Street. In 2010, an alleyway near the dog's grave was named Nipper Alley in his honour. Julian said that in the iconic painting of Nipper, the dog is sitting on his master's coffin and is looking puzzled as he cannot hear his master's voice.
- Raven's Ait was originally known as Raven's Arse but the Victorians objected to this name and it was changed in the nineteenth century. On 5 September 1217, the Treaty of Kingston was signed on the island. After the signing of Magna Carta and the death of King John, some barons had invited Prince Louis of France to become king. In the Treaty, Prince Louis renounced his title to the English throne in exchange for a substantial payment
- In the fifteenth century, Kingston possibly changed the course of English history. In May 1471 during the Wars of the Roses, when the Lancastrians were trying to reach London in order to free Henry VI who was imprisoned in the Tower, part of Kingston Bridge was taken down in order to prevent them crossing.



Julian kindly offered to come and talk to us again and we are delighted that he has agreed to speak to us on 28th June next year.

COFFEE MORNING
Wednesday 12 October 2022

Once again, the British Legion kindly opened its doors for us to enjoy a coffee, chat and some fascinating films. Jenny Wood welcomed about 35 members, and then Anthony Barnes introduced three short films, all shot around Molesey.

In memory of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, the first two films – in black-and-white with no sound – were of Molesey's Coronation celebrations in 1953 and the Queen's Silver Jubilee Carnival and street parties in 1977. We had great fun trying to work out the various locations and spotting Molesey personalities such as Reverend Yeend. Old newspapers of events in the Queen's life donated by Iris Hawkes were also on display.

Finally, we watched Danny Baker's entertaining item for 'Six o'clock Live' in 1986 about the Post Office's decision to change people's postal addresses in West Molesey from East Molesey to West Molesey. Danny Baker and local residents played up the alleged rivalry between East and West Molesey! It brought back a lot of memories!

THE HISTORY OF TAGG'S ISLAND
Friday 18 November 2022
Report by Lynda McCarter

The research project this year, carried out by members of the Society, was the history of Tagg's Island. So much information was discovered that it was decided to restrict this year's meeting to the history of the Island to the mid-1920s.

This quarter mile long ait in the Thames was originally called Walnut Tree Island. It was a haven for birds and wildlife including otters. An excavation in 1872 discovered the skull of a boar and the bones from an extinct breed of goat. A few families making and selling baskets lived there. When they were evicted, they put a gypsy curse on further enterprises there.

When Francis Jackson Kent purchased the Island it became known as Kent's Ait. A beer house known as 'The Anglers Retreat' set up business after moving from neighbouring Ash Island but failed - perhaps part of the gypsy curse.

During the late Victorian/Edwardian era, the Thames became a mecca for leisure pursuits and attracted crowds of people. The height of fashion was to own a houseboat. These were used by the wealthy for weekend parties and were luxuriously appointed for events such as the Henley Regatta. They could be towed up or down river. Celebrities such as J. M. Barrie and Sara Bernhardt were known to have enjoyed times here. Photographs of the period show the houseboats covered with extensive floral displays and decorated with Chinese

Lanterns to twinkle at night. There are still about 60 houseboats moored around the Island today.

The Taggs were a family of Dutch barge-builders who came over to England in the 1600s at the same time as William of Orange. In the mid-1800s, Thomas Tagg Senior began by building launches, skiffs and houseboats. His son, Thomas George, 'Tom Tagg Junior', joined the business in 1861. In 1868, Tom Junior had a large boathouse built with living accommodation above into which he moved with his family. By 1869, he had become a pioneer renowned for his "genius at designing and building boats from skiffs to steam launches."

Advertisements of the time showed the Taggs to be a major boatyard, listing them as Designers and Builders, Engineers and Naval Architects, Yacht Surveyors and Valuers.

In 1872, Tom Junior demolished The Anglers Retreat and built instead a luxury hotel and restaurant named 'The Island Hotel'. Tagg's Island rapidly became an entertainment centre



The Island hotel opened by Tom Tagg Junior in 1873

as well as a major boatyard. By 1890, Tom Junior was advertising his "Hospitality Empire".

He won twelve gold medals in six years and supplied British and international royalty as well as the rich and famous. In 1891, he built a luxury three-storey clubhouse with accommodation and entertainment for members on the Molesey bank, next to what is now Molesey Boat Club.

Major damage to the island after severe flooding in 1894 did not dampen his spirits, but Tom Junior caught a cold in 1897 after swimming in the Thames and died three days later. Tom Junior's son, George, inherited the business, but it ceased to prosper. In 1904, another flood ruined the island; George was declared bankrupt and all the businesses were put up for auction.

Perhaps the most interesting character in the history of Tagg's Island is Fred Karno. Born Frederick John Westcott, to a cabinet maker in Exeter, he became a famous impresario and a household name. As a teenager, he ran away to join the circus with Monsieur Olvene and toured Europe as an acrobat. After replacing an act called The Three Carnos in London, he changed his name to Karno. He preferred to look for young talent rather than using established comics and, among many others, discovered Charlie Chaplin, Stan Laurel and Will Hay.



Astoria moored at Tagg's Island during the time of Fred Karno

hotel. In its place, in only twelve weeks, he had his 'Karsino' built. The Karsino was designed by the architect, Frank Matcham, who is well-known for designing many theatres including the London Palladium and Richmond Theatre.

Surrounding a spacious 'Palm Court', the new hotel was the epitome of style and elegance. The Palm Court had a domed room painted with views of Hampton Court, Windsor Castle and other landmarks and had a reversible stage so that the audience could sit inside if the weather was poor or outside on the lawns if it was fine.

Five thousand people turned up to the hotel's opening and initially it was a great success. But, little more than a year after the Karsino opened, the First World War began. During the War, soldiers were entertained at the hotel as part of their rest and recuperation.

After the War, pioneers of the early Jazz scene performed at the Karsino but the hotel was struggling as fashions and society changed, particularly with the advent of the motor car, and the British weather didn't help! Karno was also struggling professionally as the popularity of music hall declined and films and radio became increasingly popular. In October 1927, Karno was declared bankrupt. He continued to work in entertainment but a move into the film industry was unsuccessful and in 1938, he became bankrupt again. He died in obscurity in 1941.

Were the failures of the Tagg family and Fred Karno due to bad luck or was it the gypsy curse? Find out what happened to Tagg's Island next by coming to our meeting in November 2023.

As a young man, he had spent time busking by the River Thames at Molesey and, in 1903, he fulfilled a dream when he was able to buy a houseboat called the 'Highland Lassie'. He later built himself a magnificent houseboat, 'Astoria', which quickly became the talk of the river.

It is now moored on the Hampton bank and has been converted for use as a recording studio by Dave Gilmour of Pink Floyd. In 1912, he leased Tagg's Island and pulled down the existing



The Karsino shortly after its opening on 22 June 1913

MAGICAL MOLESEY
Thursday 24 November 2022
Tudor & Co., 61 Walton Road, East Molesey KT8 0DP

We are very grateful to Reno at Tudor & Co for once again hosting the Society, enabling us to show some of the displays from our recent Tagg's Island meeting. We were visited by several members and also by several non-members, giving us the opportunity to introduce ourselves to those who did not know about the Society. We were pleased to hear people's stories about the Island which will help us in researching next year's evening about its more recent history.

HAMPTON COURT PALACE SCHOOL
By Jenny Wood

I would like to thank Ian Franklin for the enormous amount of help which he has given me in the preparation of this article. If anyone has any memories, photographs or other memorabilia relating to the Hampton Court Palace School we should be grateful if you would please contact us.

The earliest recorded Hampton Court Palace School was founded about 1840 to educate the children of soldiers garrisoned in the Palace barracks, the children of people employed in the Palace, Royal parks and paddocks and the children of inhabitants of the Royal Mews. From its inception, the Chaplain of the Chapel Royal was heavily involved in the running of the school. The school was initially for infants (pupils aged between five and seven years old) and junior girls but it soon also served as a Sunday school and later older children attended the school.

When the school was established, it was situated in a building in Tennis Court Lane next to the Tudor Kitchens but by the 1850s it was located in The Trophy Buildings, which used to stand inside Trophy Gate on the right and were used as Grace and Favour apartments. The dilapidated condition of these buildings soon rendered them unsuitable and there were calls for them to be demolished. However, they were not knocked down until 1877 following the death of the school mistress, Mrs Smeathe, in the previous year. The Chaplain of the Chapel Royal and the Grace and Favour community stressed the importance of the school to the Lord Chamberlain and he agreed that the school could move elsewhere within the Palace.



The school in Tennis Court Lane

In 1877, the building which initially housed the school on Tennis Court Lane was renovated and extended to include accommodation for a new school mistress. Guardianship of the school remained with the Chapel Royal which leased the building directly from the Crown with the aid of subscriptions collected from the Grace and Favour residents.

Many of these residents not only helped to finance the school but also volunteered to sit on the School Committee.

On average, there were 24 pupils at the school, divided between two classes. Besides the children of soldiers garrisoned at the Palace and the children of Palace employees, there may also have been some pupils who were the children or grandchildren of Grace and Favour residents. Later, local children who did not live in the Palace or its grounds were admitted and the school was also attended by the grandchildren of Grand Duchess Xenia of Russia, who lived at Wilderness House in the Palace grounds from 1937 until her death in 1960. Grand Duchess Xenia was the sister of Tsar Nicholas II and fled Russia following the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917.

In November 1883, the school was forced to close briefly because of an outbreak of dysentery, which may have originated from the army barracks in the Palace grounds. Two pupils caught the disease and died. The school was whitewashed and disinfected and it was noted that there was an urgent need for improved ventilation. Many years later, during the Second World War, the school was nearly forced to close again because all its pupils, except one, had been evacuated. However, other children gradually returned and the school survived.

Many of the school's lessons took place in and around the Palace grounds. The pupils attended services every week in the Chapel Royal. When the children left, they were all given a Bible. The annual school sports day was held in Bushy Park.

By the early 1950s, there were too few children living in the Palace or wanting to attend from the local community to justify the cost of keeping the school open. The Lord Chamberlain decided that the school must close. Mothers of children at the school and others from the local community petitioned the Queen to keep the school open but were told that the school was not fulfilling the purpose for which it was intended, namely the education of the children of Palace servants and of soldiers garrisoned at the Palace. The Lord Chamberlain also said that the school was not economical to run.

The school finally closed on 4 April 1953. The headmistress, Mrs Isobel Austen, had been at the school since 1928. The only remaining evidence of the existence of the school is a plaque on the wall outside the old school room and an iron boot-scraper.

MEMORIES OF SCHOOL IN THE PALACE

The following is an extract from 'A Ration Book Childhood 1938-1953' a book written by Rosalind Penny to give her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren a picture of her "very constrained life in the highly regulated and dangerous period of the Second World War." Rosalind attended the Palace school in 1943.

School in a Royal Palace was not as you might imagine it. There were no red carpets, stately rooms with gilded furniture and bewigged footmen. Anyone who has visited Hampton Court in the 21st century would be shocked by its wartime appearance. Inside, the rooms

were cold, dark and in need of renovation. Murals had not been cleaned and were scarcely distinguishable on the walls. All the great treasures, the smaller statues and the mythical Royal Beasts that line the moat and entrance bridge had been removed for safe storage. Large statues were boarded up and the gardens were barely maintained. Fountains were switched off, ponds and many stretches of open water were covered with camouflage netting to confuse enemy aircraft. Lawns that had not become allotments sprouted fungi. My mother and I collected and cooked the edible ones. Many areas were virtually left to Nature and became wildernesses.

The school was essentially one large room with a stove in the middle protected by an enormous metal fireguard. We were given milk each day delivered in one third of a pint bottles sealed with a cardboard disc.

In winter the milk froze and its expansion drove the disc upwards forming a column above the mouth. The sole teacher, Mrs Austen, put the bottles of milk to thaw around the stove. There was an entrance lobby where our coats hung, and a small room, probably the stockroom, where naughty children were sent to reflect on their misdeeds. On one notable occasion two boys who were Palace gardeners' sons stole peaches from the gardens. They were caned, though corporal punishment was rare in that school.



Main classroom in 1953

Across the playground stood a row of lavatories which I did not like using as they were icy cold in the winter and the ancient plumbing was not very effective. It was probably not attached to the main sewage system. The school routine was to start the day by lining up in the playground according to age. Since there were never more than 20 children some of the lines were very short. There was a pair of 4 year old twins and only three or four 11 years old. Once inside the schoolroom we divided into Infants and Juniors. Infants would be started on their tasks first.

We wrote on slates with slate pencils or chalk. Sums were copied from cards with dots beside the numbers. We must have had reading books but I don't remember what they were. On Friday afternoons we could bring toys and games into school.

Mrs Austen took us into the Palace gardens to play and picnic. It was a happy time as we felt as though we belonged to a large, privileged family. We knew the buildings and gardens intimately and could race to the centre of the maze without getting lost."

Bibliography

The Peculiar School on Tennis Court Lane - A Short History of the Hampton Court Palace School by Stewart Burzio (Chapel Royal Archivist)

Note prepared by Sarah Parker for a Hampton Court Palace School Reunion in 2005

Various newspaper clippings

60 YEARS AGO

THE MOLESEY REVIEW, September - November 1962

September

Surrey County Council had drawn up plans for a combined youth and homecraft centre to be built on a site between the infants' school and girls' secondary school at West Molesey. The Council wanted the approval of Molesey residents to the plans which were on view in the public library in St Mary's Road. The money for the centre came from the will of Henrietta Parker, who lived in Molesey for many years. When she died in 1934, she left her estate of £26,000 to her daughter and then in trust for a school of cookery at Molesey. Her daughter died in the early 1940s and since that time the money in the trust had increased to £35,000. In 1959, some of Mrs Parker's descendants contested the will unsuccessfully, but the court ruled that the trustees should prepare a scheme for using the money. The money was insufficient to buy the land, build the centre, provide staff and allow for renewals and repairs so the County Council decided to combine the homecraft centre with the youth club. The Council was going to provide the staff and the site and be responsible for the maintenance of the building. Half of the money in Mrs Parker's trust fund was to be used to meet the capital costs of building and equipping the centre, while the other half was to form an endowment fund, the income from which would go towards the cost of rates, cleaning, lighting and heating, as well as maintenance of the building and its equipment.

The fete held in August by The League of Friends of Molesey Hospital raised £230 for a rest room at the hospital. The rest room was intended to provide a place where patients who were able to move around could go to read or play games, instead of staying on the ward. An application to build 96 flats and maisonettes, 51 three-storey houses with integral garages and 62 two-storey houses and 147 garages on Hurst Park had been submitted to Esher Council. The Council deferred its decision until they had been able to consider a special report.

James Williams, the headmaster of East Molesey Boys' School, Park Road, from 1927 until his retirement in 1943, died at the age of 79. He was a keen local historian and wrote many articles on Molesey history. He was chairman of 1st Molesey Scouts for many years, treasurer of Molesey Cricket Club and a vice-president of Molesey F.C.

October

Esher Urban District Council approved the detailed scheme for the establishment of a Youth and Homecraft Centre in the grounds of West Molesey Primary School.

Esher Council had also given permission for the demolition of the Old Manor House in High Street, West Molesey and the construction of one three-storey block of four houses, one three-storey block of five houses, one three-storey block of five houses with integral garages, one two-storey block of four houses and one block of four garages. An access road was also included in the plan.

The Molesey Society had attended a Public Enquiry held in September into the future of Radnor House. The Society was supporting outline plans produced by Surrey County Council which retained the old house and provided for the construction of 20 units in the grounds. Esher Council wanted to demolish the old house to allow for the building of 20 dwellings for old people and had submitted a compulsory purchase order on the land to the Minister of Housing and Local Government.

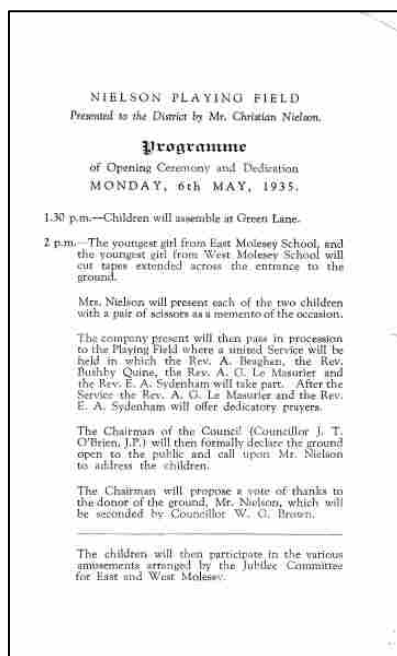
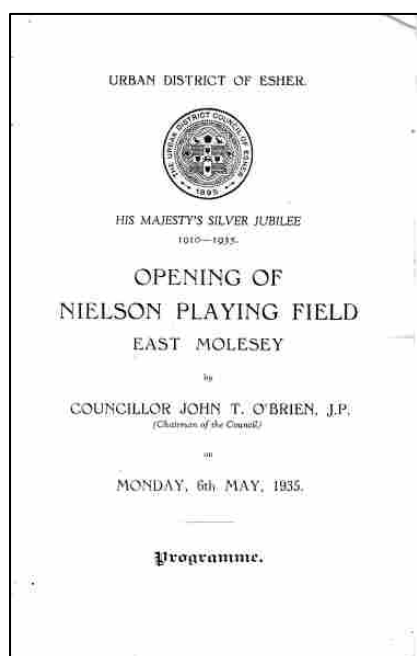
November

Molesey Councillors were urging the Council to provide off-street parking in the centre of East Molesey. The Highways Committee wanted to release space within the Council's East Molesey depot for use as a car park and was preparing a limited scheme.

NIELSON'S PLAYING FIELDS



On 12 November 2022, Julia Nielson, the granddaughter of Christian Nielson, planted a tree at Nielson's Playing Fields to commemorate the Platinum Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II (see pictures above). Christian Nielson gave the playing fields to the people of Molesey in 1935 at the time of the Silver Jubilee of King George V.



An excerpt from the Programme for the Opening of Nielson Playing Field on Monday 6 May 1935

HAMPTON COURT PALACE

The Palace is working on an exhibition about the Indian Camps held at Hampton Court in 1902, 1911, 1919 and 1937 and are hoping to put this on in Autumn 2023.

If anyone has any memorabilia, such as postcards or photographs, of the Indian Camps we should be grateful if you could please let us know so that we can arrange to put you in touch with those responsible for the exhibition.

Ian Franklin will be speaking to us in September about these Indian Camps when troops from India and nearby countries were based in Home Park so that they could take part in the coronation processions of Edward VII, George V and George VI and the commemoration of World Peace Day in 1919.

NEW FACEBOOK PAGE

Molesey Local History Society has a new private members group on Facebook if you would like to chat about local history. Anyone can find this group but only members can see who's in the group and what they post.

The link is <https://www.facebook.com/groups/722056249149516>

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