

Forthcoming Meetings

Thursday 31 January 2019, 8 pm

Annual General Meeting
The Golden Age of the Postcard
Talk by Michael Miller

St Lawrence School, Church Road, KT8 9DR

The business of the Annual General Meeting will be kept as brief as possible. Jenny Wood, our chairman, will give a report on the past year's activities and plans for future events. Following the AGM, Michael Miller, Chairman of Cranleigh History Society, will then give an illustrated talk on the early evolution of the picture postcard with examples from the golden age through to a nostalgic look back to our seaside holidays. He will begin by showing interesting and unusual postcards from his own collection. His talk will be accompanied by a poster display of 'Molesey in Old Postcards'.

Wednesday 13 March 2019, 8 pm

'Suffragists, Suffragettes and Antis': Surrey's Road to the Vote
Talk by Rosie Everitt and Anthony Barnes

Hurst Park School, Hurst Road, KT8 1QS

Last year was the centenary of the Representation of the People Act 1918. This granted the vote to women over the age of 30 who met a property qualification. The same Act gave the vote to all men over the age of 21. The debate about whether to extend the vote to women in national elections was as fiercely contested in Surrey as elsewhere in the years immediately prior to the outbreak of the First World War.

Rosie Everitt is the archivist for the Heritage Lottery-funded project 'The March of the Women: Surrey's Road to the Vote' which comes to an end in April 2019. She will draw on the findings of the project to reappraise the contribution of people and events in Surrey to this debate.

Anthony Barnes, a member of Molesey Local History Society, will talk about what happened in and around Molesey during the campaigns of the Suffragists, Suffragettes and Antis, including the arson attack on the Hurst Park racecourse grandstand in 1913 by Kitty Marion and Clara Giveen.

If you know what views members of your family living in or around Molesey at the time held about the suffrage issue, please let us know by contacting people-buildings@moleseyhistorysociety.org.

Meeting Reports

Thursday, 18th October 2018

The Weybridge Diggers
Talk by David Taylor

by Anthony Barnes

Over 60 people came to Hurst Park school to hear Dr. David Taylor's illuminating and delightful talk on Gerrard Winstanley, the seventeenth-century radical, activist and enigma. David's presentation focused on the origins of the Digger movement in the political and social turmoil following the execution of King Charles I which destroyed the legitimacy of the manorial system in Winstanley's eyes. He told the story of the Diggers' short-lived communistic settlements first on St. George's Hill in Weybridge and then on Little Heath in Cobham in 1649-50. It was fascinating to hear about Winstanley's ideas and the opposition to him locally as well as from the authorities. The puzzle is why everything he wrote was concentrated into a four-year period from 1648-52 even though he lived until 1676. The twenty or so tracts he published in this time fill two substantial volumes; but why did he stop? A clue may be in these words that he almost certainly wrote at the time:

"And here I end, having put my arm as far as my strength will go to advance Righteousness; I have Writ, I have Acted, I have Peace: now I must wait to see the Spirit do his work in the hearts of others, and whether England shall be the first Land, or some other, wherein Truth shall sit down in triumph."

Winstanley's influence on events in his own time was not particularly great. Historians kept his memory alive until he became more widely known at the end of the nineteenth century. Groups as conflicting and diverse as socialists, communists, anarchists, libertarians, Quakers and environmentalists have all found elements in Winstanley's writings that prefigure their own ideas and beliefs. In the second half of the twentieth century, Christopher Hill, the historian, did much to raise awareness of Winstanley's ideas. David Taylor still remembers the thrill of arranging Hill's visit to the local sites associated with the Diggers, and some years later a visit by the Labour leader, Michael Foot, who gave a passionate talk about Winstanley.

"England is not a free people, till the poor that have no land, have a free allowance to dig and labour the commons..."
Gerard Winstanley, 1649



Contemporary Woodcut of Soldiers driving the Diggers off the Common

For those less familiar with the story of the Diggers, they were a radical and egalitarian agricultural movement. Winstanley believed that God had spoken these words to him during a trance: "worke together, eat bread together; declare this all abroad." He and John Everard led a group of followers who may have numbered as many as 200 onto the common land on St. George's Hill in August 1649 where they built simple houses and sowed crops. After 21 weeks, they were forced out by the authorities and the local people who felt their use of the common land was threatened. The Diggers de-camped to Little Heath, Cobham, in April 1650 where they were slightly better received by Bishop John Platt, the Lord of the Manor, and the local people before they turned on them. Their settlement lasted about 34 weeks.

David is passionate about securing for Winstanley the recognition he is due as probably Elmbridge's most important national figure.

He has campaigned for a plaque in St. Andrew's Church to commemorate Winstanley's role as a churchwarden, in whose footsteps David has followed, and would like to see plaques on buildings associated with the Diggers and to inaugurate an annual Winstanley lecture devoted to social issues of the day. These suggestions are not always well-received as even to this day Winstanley remains a controversial political figure.

David has written numerous books and articles on the history of Cobham; and is frequently asked to give talks on Winstanley. He is currently Chair of Surrey History Trust which organises talks at Surrey History Centre and raises funds to buy documents for Surrey History Centre that come on the market. He urged members to support that work (<https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/culture-and-leisure/history-centre/donate/trust/membership>).

Friday 23 November 2018, 8 pm

'1968 and All That'

A History of Flooding in Molesey

By Lynda McCarter

Fifty years ago in September 1968, Molesey suffered a devastating flood. Our meeting in November was the culmination of many months of research and interviews by members into this and previous floods. The Ballroom at Imber Court was full of displays and information, which the large numbers of members and guests could enjoy before and after the meeting. Our evening began with Roger Hoad, a retired surveyor, explaining why Molesey is prone to flooding. The three main rivers, the Thames, the Mole and the Ember surround Molesey, which is only 23-35 inches above sea level. Records have been kept of the floods over the years; the first is documented in 1233.

Julian Mayes, a climatologist, explained the unique weather patterns in September 1968. The wind direction kept a significant area of low pressure stationary over South East England. Over the weekend of 14th and 15th September many areas received a month's rainfall. Flood schemes had been put in place before, but the deluge resulted in four times more water than ever anticipated. Roger then carried on to tell us about the consequences. In some places the water was 5-6 feet deep. Emergency services were mobilised, but communications were a problem. The Army delivered bread and milk on DUKWs. Reception centres were set up and used by hundreds of people. In all, three thousand five hundred homes were damaged in the Esher Urban District Council area. The Council set up a relief fund for the worst affected, but in the clean-up operation afterwards, they initially only provided two bottles of disinfectant per household.

Eye-witness accounts followed from three residents who had lived in Molesey at that time. Two had been teenagers and found it all a bit of an adventure and an excuse to miss school. The third was a parent, who emphasised the worry and anxiety caused and talked of the remarkable sense of community spirit with people looking out for each other. They had put a sign 'Dry House' outside their house, with an open door for anyone who needed help and their son went out in a rowing boat to run errands for stranded residents. They had a friend who used his boat to ferry dogs to dry land so that the dogs could relieve themselves. All agreed that the clean-up was by far the worst time.

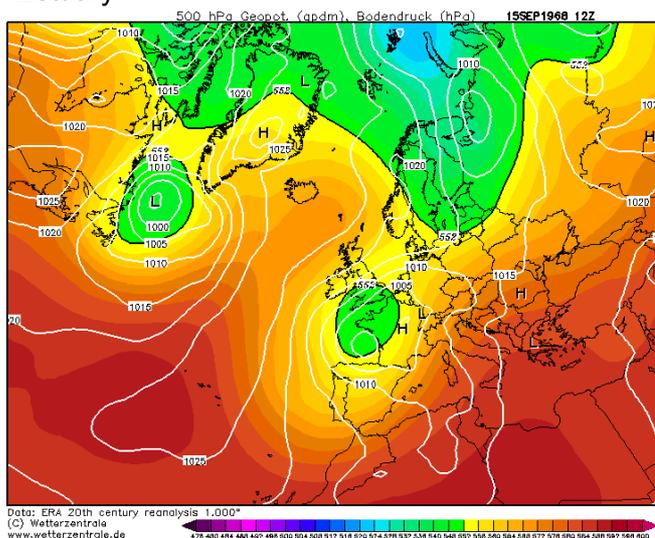
We were very lucky to have four members of The Barn Theatre Club to entertain us. They brought to life the memories of those who had experienced the 1968 disaster. These memories vividly described the devastation caused to homes and the heroic efforts of the armed forces, police and the general public to help those affected. Many also had fond memories of happy times when families got together to help each other out and pool their resources to enjoy communal meals and share accommodation. It was evident that the people of Molesey rose to the occasion with great community spirit.

Remembering a Local Weather Disaster from 50 Years Ago

Report by Julian Mayes

On 23 November 2018, around 200 members of the Molesey Local History Society in Surrey gathered to remember the flood of 15 – 16 September 1968. The Society had put together a range of speakers covering the causes of the flooding and several members reported on their personal experiences of the event, mostly as school-children. A large exhibition of photographs and archival items was displayed and actors recreated the memories of numerous local people who had contributed stories. The evening demonstrated that the event was still remembered vividly. This is no doubt due to the fact that most of the town was flooded by waters from the River Mole.

The purpose of this note is simply to record the degree to which collaboration can yield a variety of new insights and memories - even half-a-century after a major weather event - and to gather evidence of its impacts before archival evidence is lost. However, in passing, the main elements of the event can be outlined as follows. A slow-moving depression over Biscay spread occluding fronts slowly north across southern England. They became stationary on 14 September as a surface NE flow became established over southern Britain. This flow became destabilised by the development and south-eastward movement of an upper cold pool. At the same time, the instability of the surface flow was augmented by its passage over the warm waters of the Thames Estuary.



The weather situation at 12Z, 15 September 1968 (Source: ERA reanalysis www.wetterzentrale.de). The white lines are isobars of air pressure measured at the surface. The coloured shading represents the temperature of the first 5km of the atmosphere. The green colour over southern England is the 'upper cold pool' referred to in the text – this means that cold air lay above the relatively warm air at the surface, making the air very unstable, increasing the risk of heavy downpours.

Rainfall totals over 48-hours reached 150mm in parts of the Mole and Medway catchments to the south of London. Locally, over 200mm fell in south Essex around Tilbury. The severest flooding occurred in Guildford from the Wey, in Tonbridge from the Medway and probably worst of all, in Molesey from the Mole.

The flooding in the town did not develop until Monday 16th by which time the rain had moved away. The key was the formation of a lake of flood water upstream of the town which had formed as water cascaded under a series of railway bridges. The flatness of the town meant that flood waters covered much of Molesey, leading to the AA creating a road-sign warning motorists that East and West Molesey were 'closed'.

The History Society has now created an archive that will be used in a forthcoming exhibition. After a first meeting held on the 40th anniversary, a third meeting is planned for next year focussing on the flood prevention scheme that followed. Altogether, a very impressive response.

A brief note on the weather of 1968

1968 was a notable year for extreme weather in the UK. It was one of the more blocked years of the 20th century, meaning that the normal westerly flow of winds across the UK was often blocked by high or low pressure systems. There was a small air pressure gradient around the UK and there were just 64 days with a westerly airflow. Pressure anomalies for the year ranged from -1.0mbar in Kent to above +2.0 in northern Scotland. Low pressure close to south-eastern parts of the country gave an unsettled summer here in contrast to the fine conditions that often prevailed over north-west Britain. The dominance of north-easterly winds heightened this weather contrast.

November Review

- Molesey's lockkeeper, Mr R. Provis, was presented with the City of London Cup for the best kept lock on the Thames. The Cup had first been presented in 1957 to mark the centenary of the Thames Conservancy Board. With three assistants, Mr Provis operated Molesey Lock twenty four hours a day and he won the Cup for his efficiency and conduct.
- The profit on the 1958 Molesey Carnival run by the Molesey St John Ambulance Brigade was £120 1s 6d. After six years of organising the Carnival, the St John Ambulance Brigade had decided not to run it in future and asked for another organisation to continue it.
- Esher Council recommended the extension of the East & West Molesey cemetery.
- There was an article by C. R. S. Saunders about a proposal by the Chelsea Waterworks Company in 1873 to build reservoirs and a river wall on the banks of the Thames opposite Hampton Court Palace. The Company wanted to construct reservoirs covering 50 acres or more on low-lying meadow land between the Swan Hotel and where the river Ember joined the Thames. The plan was strongly opposed by local people from both Long Ditton and Thames Ditton and the Bill to build the reservoirs was defeated in the House of Lords.

December Review

- Esher Council had approved a plan providing for the second stage of the redevelopment of the Upper Farm Estate from its existing internal cul-de-sac roads by the erection of 4 two-bedroomed and 20 three-bedroomed houses.

ARTHUR NOEL AYLIFFE (1899 – 1974)

Wireless Officer in the Merchant Navy during WW1 and resident of East Molesey for over fifty years
by Rosemary Searle



My grandfather, Arthur Ayliffe, was born in Camberwell, South London and educated there and at St. George's School, Worthing. His favourite pastime was cricket and in 1914 he was selected from several hundred schoolboys to play at Kennington Oval, representing the East London Schools against those of West London.

After leaving school, he joined the British Medical Association as a Junior Clerk, but early in the First World War at the age of 16 years, after giving his age as 17, he volunteered for service and qualified as a Wireless Officer in the Merchant Navy. His instructor in Wireless Telegraphy at Marconi House (then in the Strand) was subsequently to become Lord Reith of BBC fame. By coincidence, one of his fellow trainees was Rodney Gale, son of Mrs. Gale, a much-respected licensee of the Castle Hotel in East Molesey. This hotel, which may be remembered by long-term inhabitants of Molesey, was demolished in 1932 to make way for the present Hampton Court Bridge.

On numerous voyages to South America, Canada, the United States and South Africa, my grandfather survived German submarine torpedo attacks on convoys carrying high explosives and oil and transporting troops and horses. In fact, several of his ships were sunk on voyages immediately following his transfer to another vessel. On one voyage, whilst in New York harbour, he heard one of the early experimental messages by radio telephony. After the 1914-18 war, he was employed in marine insurance in the City of London by Arbon Langrish & Co., Lloyds Brokers.

In 1922 he moved to East Molesey and was married that year to his childhood sweetheart and neighbour from Fawnbrake Avenue, Herne Hill, my grandmother, Phyllis "Connie" Newstead at St. Paul's Church. She had moved from Herne Hill to Wolsey Road, East Molesey with her widowed mother and younger brother in 1917 for safety reasons, as bombing of London had begun.

For many years, my grandfather was a member of St. Paul's Cathedral Lecture Society. He was always interested in church activities and during the 1940s and '50s was Secretary of St. Paul's Church, East Molesey, Social Committee, organising concerts and the lavish church garden parties which were held in the grounds of Murree House, Vine Road.

He was also keenly interested in local history and published an informative booklet on the history of St. Mary's Church for the Centenary Celebrations in 1965, which culminated in a televised service and he often had other articles of a religious nature published in the Molesey News and Molesey Review. He also sang for many years in the choir of St. Mary's.

Sources: Arthur Ayliffe's WW1 diaries and letters and personal information. © Rosemary Searle

Memories of Nielson's

We have received this email from Kevin Crossfield. If you would like to contact him with memories of Nielson's, please let us know.

'I am 75 years of age, live abroad and I am researching material for a book. If you can help me I would be extremely grateful. The book tells the adventures and stories of the workers of a firm, based in East Molesey, called Nielson. They were marquee contractors.

I am from the north of England and at the time I first came to East Molesey, I was a first year student at Leeds University. I worked for three summers at Nielson's as a "tent man" to supplement my grant. The three summers based in East Molesey were three of the most enjoyable years of my 75 years of living a full life.

Early each morning the workers would assemble in a building containing bundles of canvas, separated ready for each gang. The names of the destinations for the days work was chalked next to the bundles. A gang consisted of: the ganger (foreman), usually another regular, a driver, the three of whom would occupy the cab and two to four casuals. The casuals like myself were employed usually during the season from May through September. The casuals were usually on the back of the lorry, clinging onto whatever perches we could find. Sometimes big jobs like the High Wycombe annual Fete, entailed two or three gangs and a few days work.

The canvas and the necessary uprights, ridges, pegs, poles and ropes were loaded onto the lorry assigned to the "ganger". Then we would head off to erect marquees, tents and awnings..

Depending on our destination the first stop was the best transport café on the route. We erected tents at shows, regattas, vicarage tea parties, weddings and all types of fetes throughout Southern England. We worked at Paul Getty's "Sutton Place". We worked at 10 Downing Street. On the journey home a suitable pub, usually known to the ganger and driver, was selected to round off the day with 7 card brag and a few beers before we arrived back at the yard between 7 and 10 pm.

My memories are full of incidents and stories involving my fellow workers, many of whom had spent time at her majesties pleasure. However, at 75, my memory is fading fast and I would like to contact ANYONE who worked at Nielson's around that period to confirm some details. If you could find anyone who can provide any details/ photos or recollections of the people who worked there at the time, I would be very grateful. Most of the people who worked there were a few years older than I was at the time, but I am sure there are quite a few still around. I recall people such as: Jim Denby, Pete Compton, brothers Whistle and Bert, Paul (I remember his nose), Mick (the Joker), Earnie Greetham, Ces, Ray, Del (and Teddington Lil)

I would be delighted to hear from anyone who can recall that young northerner, called Kevin, that used to say "wait yur rush" instead of "ang about" or can provide any information about the firm and its employees. The book will be full of some of these wonderful characters and the tales and adventures of those three summers.'

Subscription Renewals 2019

Membership subscriptions for 2019 are now due. If you joined the Society after 1 October, you will not receive a renewal notice, as your membership continues through 2019. As usual, you will have the opportunity to renew your membership at the AGM on Thursday 31 January. We do hope that you will find something of interest in our programme and will continue to support the Society and the events that are planned for the year.

Elmbridge Museum

Elmbridge Museum is reviewing how it engages with residents so that it can plan for the future and provide a better service. There is an online survey until the end of March where residents can give their ideas and opinions on the Museum.

The survey is now uploaded onto the Museum website: <http://elmbridgemuseum.org.uk/> and the EBC website www.elmbridge.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture.

This questionnaire should take about 15 minutes to complete. If you leave your contact details at the end, you will be entered in a prize draw for a chance to win a £50 Marks and Spencer voucher, a free 1-month gym membership at Xcel Leisure Complex or a 10 free swim card. The closing date is 31 March 2019.

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