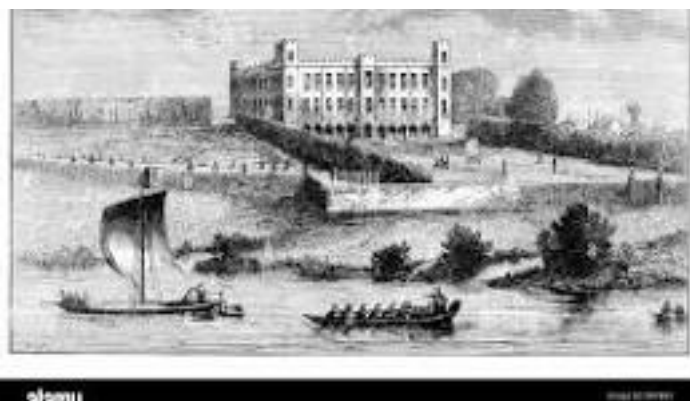




Summer 2025

Spring Speakers

Looking back on our talks earlier this year, we enjoyed themes as diverse as social climbing in the fifteenth century to Wilfred Owen's heart wrenching descriptions of the trench warfare of World War 1. We started our programme in March with Dr Virginia Bainbridge's account of how quite humble yeoman stock could rise to become bishops, wool merchants, custom officials, judges, and even attain senior roles in royal circles. Dr Bainbridge centred her talk on Syon Abbey, its 'prayer power' and Abbess Constance Browne, a member of the Danvers family who had a remarkably good network of influential family members. One strategy to get up the social ladder was to found colleges such as All Souls and Magdalen in Oxford and abbeys including Syon. (see below)



The April talk by Mark Page one of the Victoria County History researchers was based on his work comparing the parishes of Kingham, Churchill and Sarsden. Sarsden was always smaller though had powerful Lords of the Manor. Its church lacked a burial ground which deterred people from living there. It had a population recorded in Domesday Book of 97 (including 34 'slaves'). In



1801 the population was 92. Churchill though bigger, suffered devastating fires and much rebuilding. (Sarsden Manor and church above)

The subject of our May talk by Jane Potter was The `Life of Wilfred Owen, the world war 1 poet. Born in 1893, Owen became a teacher in France which he loved working in Bordeaux in 1914. With war coming soon after he felt he didn't want to train to be a soldier but just go and fight. When he reached the western front he recorded its horrors of death in mud sucking clay. Hit by shell blast he lay by a dead officer for some days until sent to hospital in England where he met Siegfried Sassoon and they became close friends. Owen (below right) was killed a week before Armistice day in 1918. He only published five poems during his life time but their power remains today particularly in his poem Dulce et Decorum Est from which this is the opening verse:

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our back,
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind.



A gentler view of life around that period was depicted in our June talk by Helen Castle on the life of Richard Widdows, the Great Rollright shepherd whose main claim to fame seems to have been that he lived to 104 though birth records according to Helen Castle can vary this by 10-11 years. The talk gave a picture of the tough working and village life of an agricultural labourer much dependent on the local squire for employment. No wonder his eldest son took assisted migration to New Zealand.



The first half of the year ended with our picnic celebrating St Kenelm's day on July 17th as usual held in St Kenelm's churchyard under the magnificent old yews and as usual we had good weather. About twenty people attended the evening - see photos below



EHS Archives

Members of the committee have been going through the extensive amount of archive material the society possesses. The individual catalogued materials are now being collated by the chairman. If any member has anything they think would be a useful addition to the archive now would be a good time to include it and they should contact the chairman (01608 678175)

Autumn Programme

September 24 : The History in your Post covering the early history of the Postal Services by Simon Townley.,

October 15: Oxfordshire and the Spanish Civil War by Liz Woolley

November 12: Mark Abrey will tell us about St Kenelm's church records, family histories and old tombstones.

As usual meetings will be held at St Kenelm's church, Church Enstone beginning at 6.30pm with wine and sandwiches before the talk starting at 7pm.

New members are always welcome at the meetings.

Carol Geare ,Editor, 01608 677246.

John Pritchard, Chairman, 01608 678175

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