



AMPTHILL & DISTRICT PRESERVATION SOCIETY

Spring 2024 Newsletter

Welcome to the 2024 Spring Newsletter. As we reflect on the first half of our 23-24 programme, we look forward to the remaining 23-24 programme of talks and activities.

Our first lecture of the year was the postponed and eagerly awaited Eric Houfe Memorial Lecture: English Garden Eccentrics - Three Hundred Years of Extraordinary Groves, Burrowings, Mountains and Menageries: delivered by Todd Longstaffe-Gowan who provided an excellent insight into some extraordinary and eccentric gardens.

In November, James McGregor delivered a very interesting and informative talk on Edward Bawden, covering his influence on the art world and why he left the legacy of over 3000 of his works to Cecil Higgins Art Gallery in Bedford rather than the local Fry Gallery in Saffron Walden where he resided.

Our seasonal meeting in December provided the opportunity for us to showcase the “Go-Live” presentation of our Ampt Hill Past Memories Project delivered by Mariella Cook & Sandra Read with invited VIPS, some of whom already feature in the podcasts.

The main event of the evening was Patience, Jigsaws and Other Games Archivists Play delivered by Pamela Birch who provided an entertaining talk about what archivists (and conservators) do all day, using the analogy of various games, whilst engaging the audience in participation

We look forward to the **Remaining Lecture Programme for 2023-24:**

Tuesday 5th March 2024:

How to Research your Family’s Military Ancestry: Steve Roberts

Steve Roberts is an ex-serviceman who works conducting bespoke military research and tours for both individuals and groups as well as working on a number of television documentaries. He has a particular passion for the First World War and has co-authored a number of books on the subject, including Ghosts of the Somme: Filming the Great Battle July 1916 (published in 2009) and The Platoon: An Infantryman on the Western Front 1916-18 (published in 2013). This lecture will provide guidance as to how to carry out research into your own family’s military ancestry, including what records exist, how to access them and how to interpret them.

Tuesday 9th April 2024:

The History of Wrest Park, covering its 800-year History and Stories: Richard Luscombe

Richard is the Volunteer Historical Records Keeper at Wrest Park, working as part of the Volunteer History Research Team. We are hoping that we can link this talk with a future visit “behind the scenes” at Wrest Park during Summer 2024.

Tuesday 7th May 2024:

Eric Houfe Memorial Lecture: King Offa and Bedford: Professor Simon Keynes

This lecture will look at the evidence which exists to support the claim made in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle that the mighty Mercian King Offa (died 796) was laid to rest in Bedford. Professor Simon Keynes is the emeritus Ellington and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Cambridge University and a fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge. He is a world authority on the subject and has published many books and articles, including as the co-author of Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources which forms part of the Penguin Classic Series.

Programme of Walks 2023-24

Whilst retaining some of the popular walks John has also introduced some new ones for this year. His Ghost Walks continue to be extremely popular and places fill really quickly.

John's next walk in April is a new one and we are looking forward to it. Thanks to John for his ongoing enthusiasm and also for allowing Sandra and Mariella to experiment with recording them, so that we can make them available for those unable to join the walks to listen to and follow the trail on a map of Ampthill.

Please email amphillanddistrictps@gmail.com to book your place on a walk

Saturday 20th April 2024: John's Pub Crawl!

Over the years, there have been at least 22 hostelries in Ampthill. These inns and alehouses have been the mainstay of quenching the thirst of residents and visitors for centuries. Although the Morris Brewery was the main producer of ale for about 130 years, there were many other small brewers in the town. This tour around Ampthill will point out where the hostelries were and how they fitted into the local community.

Saturday 11th May 2024: St Andrews Church

The church as it stands today is almost certainly the oldest building in the town, being over 500 years old. Much of Ampthill's history is contained within its walls and roof. This walk around the church will point out many of these historical features, together with some amusing stories concerning the clashes between Ampthill's nobility!

Saturday 15th June 2024: Secret Ampthill

With any town of the age of Ampthill there are going to be those interesting little features that you probably walk past every day and never notice. This walk explores the town and highlights the hidden gems and why they are there, including the various graveyards in the town.

Saturday 20th July 2024: Graveyard Tour

For its size, Ampthill has one of the largest graveyards in the county. There are some fascinating characters buried there with interesting stories to be told. The tour covers some sad stories, together with memorials and graves of Lords and Ladies with fascinating stories to tell.

Saturday 7th September 2024: Ampthill's Origins through the Park

Ampthill Park has had an enormous influence on the town, from prehistoric times to the present day. This walk around the park will highlight a whole range of historical features and why they are there, as well as piecing together how various historical events have contributed to the nation's historical past.

Ampthill Past Memories Project Spring 2024

The Ampthill Past Memories Project takes us on a stroll down memory lane with recordings of Ampthill residents sharing their stories.

It's a unique peek into the heart and soul of our town's history. The memories allow us to explore Ampthill's past through the personal tales and cherished memories of its residents

All volunteers are asked to sign a confidentiality agreement to ensure privacy is maintained for individuals participating and all records will be centrally maintained. We have now recruited additional volunteers from the Society to help with the recruitment of interviewees and the interviewing. However more will be required, especially to help with transcribing the interviews.

Having only one set of Podcast recording equipment and a laptop to store the recorded interviews for editing and processing is now limiting our ability to conduct more interviews each week, and so we will be seeking more funding to buy another set of equipment.

We are very fortunate that we continue to have the expertise of Terry Lee, a University of Bedfordshire Senior Tutor in Radio & Audio who lives locally. Furthermore, his students are now becoming involved with conversion to podcasts, a more technical part of this project.

Thank you to Cllr Susan Clinch, who introduced us to residents who were attending the Community Café at the Ampthill Greensand Community Church and to Rev. Silas Wood, who allows us to use his office for recording interviews.

A later stage of the project will be to enrol interested volunteers to transcribe the podcasts into documents, copies of which will be lodged with Bedfordshire Archives and National Archives. We are well on track for completing the 20 interviews as podcasts by May 2024 and will probably achieve many more interviews although they may not be converted to podcasts by then.

If you are interested in becoming an interviewer or transcribing interviews or indeed, being interviewed yourself, please get in touch.

**For further information on any aspect of this newsletter,
please email ampthillanddistrictps@gmail.com or call 07778 876889.**