



AMPTHILL & DISTRICT PRESERVATION SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

September 2026

WWW.ADPS.ORG.UK

A NOTE FROM JO LEARY, ADPS CHAIRPERSON so much has happened since our AGM in May...

- In June several members participated in an archaeological dig in Ampthill Great Park; see report later in this newsletter.
- Also, in June we sponsored the "Two Apothecaries" to attend the Aragon Day Festivities.



- In July an evening of croquet was enjoyed at Wrest Park Croquet Club, followed by nibbles and chat, the consensus was that everyone would like to do it again, so it has already been booked!



- In the same week we attended the Big Tent Weekend to promote our Society and highlight Ampthill's history. The children enjoyed adding their fingerprint ant to our "ant-infested" hill whilst hopefully learning about the origins of the name of Ampthill. We also had a multiple-choice quiz for adults which generated much curiosity and led to some interesting conversations. Even Blake Stephenson, our local MP, took part - but we won't embarrass him by revealing his score!



It is with sadness we have to report on the death of Honorary Member Simon Houfe in July. Many of you will be aware that Simon, his father and grandfather have been leading figures in our Society. Please take time to read the tribute to Simon in this newsletter.

During this coming season an important milestone will be reached, the 75th Anniversary in February 2027 of the Ampthill and District Preservation Society. To mark the occasion, we will be holding a quiz night on Saturday 13th February, at the Wingfield Club, the same venue where the inaugural meeting was held. We hope that you and your friends will support this event so please save the date, further information will be out shortly.

Remember that our walks are very popular, so if you are interested in any then please email membership@adps.org.uk to book, it's never too early!

Coming Soon: Our first meeting of the season is on Tuesday 6th Oct - "A History of the Ampthill Union Workhouse, now known as 'The Cedars' ". Hope to see you there.



Amphill Park DigVentures Archaeological Dig - Report by June Goddard (ADPS Member)

Between 6–18 June, twelve members of the Amphill and District Preservation Society participated in the DigVentures excavation at Amphill Great Park.

Three trenches were opened just outside the scheduled monument area surrounding the remains of Amphill Castle.

DigVentures initially hypothesised that Trench 3 might contain an outbuilding associated with the Tudor castle, possibly a stable block. However, by the time I joined on Day 4, it had become clear that the remains instead related to a First World War training camp used to prepare soldiers for deployment to France.

Evidence of training trenches and three parallel wires were already visible on the surface.



Once the weather improved, we began “cleaning the trench”: carefully removing the upper layer of sand with trowels, or hoes where needed. An expert directed us on where to begin, how much to remove, and emphasised the guiding principle that any find which did not wobble should remain in situ until later stages.

Heavy rain confined the group to one of the tents for much of the morning, ultimately shortening the day. During this time, ADPS member John Hele delivered an engaging overview of Amphill's history, tracing its development from its earliest origins to the present. With participants travelling from as far as Australia and the United States, the talk provided valuable context and a strong sense of the town's rich past.



All finds were collected in trays and cleaned with toothbrushes or toothpicks depending on their fragility. After washing and sorting, the objects were prepared for specialist analysis. Three members of the ADPS participated in the finds experience on the final Sunday of the dig.

Although the excavation followed strict archaeological procedures, the DigVentures team were consistently supportive, ensuring that participants understood each task and felt confident asking for guidance. It proved an excellent opportunity to experience hands-on archaeology within a well-structured environment.

On Day 4 we were supported by Darcey, Harriet and Steph, along with the wider team. As Steph observed, Amphill's deep history had drawn participants from across the UK and around the world, making the experience both educational and memorable. For several attendees, myself included, it was a genuine “once in a lifetime” opportunity.

Bedfordshire Local History Society AGM and Conference - John Mower (Vice Chair-Person)

On Saturday June 6th I attended the 31st Annual General Meeting and Conference of the Bedfordshire Local History Association, held in St Mary's Parish Church, Luton.

The business of the day began with the AGM, including reports from the Chairman and Treasurer. After the formal opening to the Conference, we were treated to a fascinating talk by Paul Hammond on the history of George Street Luton, the main thoroughfare of the town. This was of particular interest to me as, before the Arndale Centre was built (now known as Frasers Plus Luton) in the early 1970s, my grandfather and father owned a hardware shop on the nearby Park Square.



After a break for tea and coffee we heard from Toni Fielding and Aisha Hassan on the history of Vauxhall Motors and its long association with Luton. The Luton Made Exhibition at the Stockwood Discovery Centre is a major heritage display celebrating 120 years of Vauxhall and includes the first and last cars built in the town, (to find out more visit lutonmade.com).

Two afternoon sessions, the first given by Felicity Brimblecombe on the Leigh Family and their involvement with the railways in Luton. It was fascinating to hear that whilst Luton Hoo had two railway stations Luton itself had none and had to wait until 1868 to get its own station, originally known as Luton Midland Road.

Finally, Peter Adams spoke on the power of Church Patronage from 1763 – 1896 and how it shaped the social history of the town.

At the end of a long day the closing remarks were made by Des Hoar, the Chairman of BLHA.

(Following John's attendance at this event we have booked Paul Hammond for one of our future talks. Next year the BLHA Conference will be marking the 400th anniversary of John Bunyan's birth; if anyone is interested and would like to represent our Society at this event then please let Jo know.)

Dates for your diaries.

Talks.

2026

- 6 Oct - A brief history of the Ampthill Union Workhouse, now known as "The Cedars" (Clare Harvey).
- 3 Nov - Bedfordshire's Secret War and Covert Connections in the Chilterns (Jean Yates)
- 1 Dec - Ampthill's Beer houses, Alehouses and Inns (John Hele).

2027

- 13 Feb (Saturday) - Evening of celebration for 75th Anniversary of ADPS at the Wingfield Club.
- 2 Mar - The Bedford Mint and local Trade Tokens (Simon Rowley).
- 6 April - The Marston Vale Line, Past, Present & Future (Stephen Sleight).
- 4 May - The Mosquito that crashed in Steppingley Road Field in 1945 (Mark Rankine).

Walks.

2026

- Tues 27 Oct - Ghost Walk 7.30pm
- Sun 1 Nov - Stewartby 2:00pm

2027

- Tues 19 Jan - Ghost Walk 7.30pm
- Sat 24 April - Secret Ampthill 2.00pm
- Tues 11 May - John's Pub Crawl! 7:00pm
- Tues 15 June - Vintage Ventures 7:00pm
- Sat 17 July - Graveyard Tour 2:00pm.

Autumn Trip(s) - Intelligence Museum

We are organising three guided tours around the Intelligence Museum at Chicksands in November.

These will be on Tuesday 10th 10-12;

Tuesday 17th 2 – 4;

Thursday 26th 2 – 4

This is a good opportunity to see the museum while it is still in Bedfordshire as there are plans to move it to London soon.

If you have never heard of this museum in Central Bedfordshire, they have an interesting website:

<https://www.militaryintelligencemuseum.org>



Scan the QR code or go to <https://www.adps.org.uk> for further details.



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