



# Corsham Spotlight

Journal of the Corsham Civic Society

<http://www.corshamcivicsociety.co.uk>

Autumn 2016

November 2016, Vol. 13, Issue 3

## Contents

From the Chairman	1
An early photograph at Corsham Station	3
Gospel Halls in the Corsham area	4
The Buildings of Corsham talk	7
'Young' Pickwickians Part Two	11
Old Pickwickians	14
Heritage Open Days September 2016	15
'Above and beyond' ~ the WWI hospital at Corsham town hall	16
Tablet to Tablet exhibition	17
Cream Tea 2016	18
Governing Wiltshire: Almost a Thousand Years of Manorial Records	19
Letters	22

Society welcomes new members. Join us to enjoy talks on local subjects, trips to interesting places and the company of local people interested in both the history and future of this lovely Wiltshire town. For membership contact Jean Beech on 01249 713833

## The Buildings of Corsham



*The Palladian style house known as The Grove, built in 1737 [Pevsner], which stands opposite the southern end of the High Street opposite The Methuen Arms.*

## Officers and Committee Members:

### President

Mrs. Anne Lock,  
Tel: 01225 810357

### Chairman

Mr. Michael Rumsey,  
Tel: 01249 715741

### Secretary

Victoria Blake,  
Tel: 01249 716286

### Treasurer

Elizabeth Addison,  
Tel: 07919 352002

### Membership Secretary

Mrs. Jean Beech,  
Tel: 01249 713833

### Social Organiser

Mrs. Joan Maciver,  
Tel: 01225 812225

### Programme Organiser

Dr. Negley Harte,  
Tel: 01249 713529

### Plans Chairman

Margaret Smith,  
Tel: 01249 715459

### Spotlight Editor

John Maloney,  
Tel: 01249 715159

Pat Whalley,  
Tel: 01249 713618

## From the Chairman

Another end of year approaches. 'Time flies' I used to be told when I was younger and now I find that's perfectly true! 2016 has been a year with excellent meetings, all organised by Dr. Negley Harte, and Negley has now produced a most interesting set of subjects for our delectation and delight for 2017, so do read through the contents of our new programme which can be seen on the back cover of 'Spotlight'.

It was unfortunate we were unable to proceed with the proposed October visit to Westonbirt Arboretum, but as you may observe, we are hoping to visit this fascinating place in October 2017 when the Autumn colours should be at their best.

At the July meeting a presentation was made to Jujhar Garcha who had completed a year as our 'Spotlight' Editor. The Executive Committee decided at its June meeting to make Jujhar an Honorary member of the Society as a thank you for his excellent efforts in producing 3 issues of 'Spotlight' between November 2015 and July 2016. The Society also presented him with a £50 book token to assist him with his further education studies.



Anne Lock, President of the Society presenting Jujhar Garcha with his framed Honorary Members Certificate together with the Chairman.

All that it remains for me to do now is to wish every member a very Happy Christmas and continued good health and happiness in 2017 and to thank you all for your continued support of the Corsham Civic Society of which I am proud to be its Chairman.

*Article continues on next page .....*

*Contributions to Spotlight are very welcome. Please contact the new editor, John Maloney, at: johnmaloney2003@aol.com*

## Welcome to the new Editor of 'Spotlight'.

On behalf of the Executive Committee and all the membership it gives me great pleasure to welcome John Maloney as the new Editor of 'Spotlight'. John has edited several 'in house' magazines over the years, but since retiring from the Pre-Construct Archaeology in London and now living in Pickwick with his wife Cath, he kindly volunteered to undertake the task of producing 3 editions of 'Spotlight' per year. John would like to receive any articles from members or other interested persons and his email address can be found on the front cover of this edition. Thank you John for undertaking this task for the Society and we wish you well in your new position as Editor.

## 'Poldark' series 2, Autumn 2016.

Though the current series was not filmed in Corsham, glimpses of Church Street and the High Street, around the Town Hall, have appeared on a number of occasions in this 2<sup>nd</sup> series. Great Chalfield Manor featured a good deal in several episodes being the home of a squire played by John Nettles. For the home of Ross Poldark's cousin, Chavenage House on the outskirts of Tetbury has been used while the recent crown court scenes were shot in John Wesley's Chapel in Broadmead, Bristol.

## Michael Rumsey

## Membership News

This has been a good period for membership with four new members including 2 life members.

We extend a warm welcome to Ms Maree Whyte, Nicola Clifford, Paul Nicklin and Sam Antrobus who have recently joined the Society.

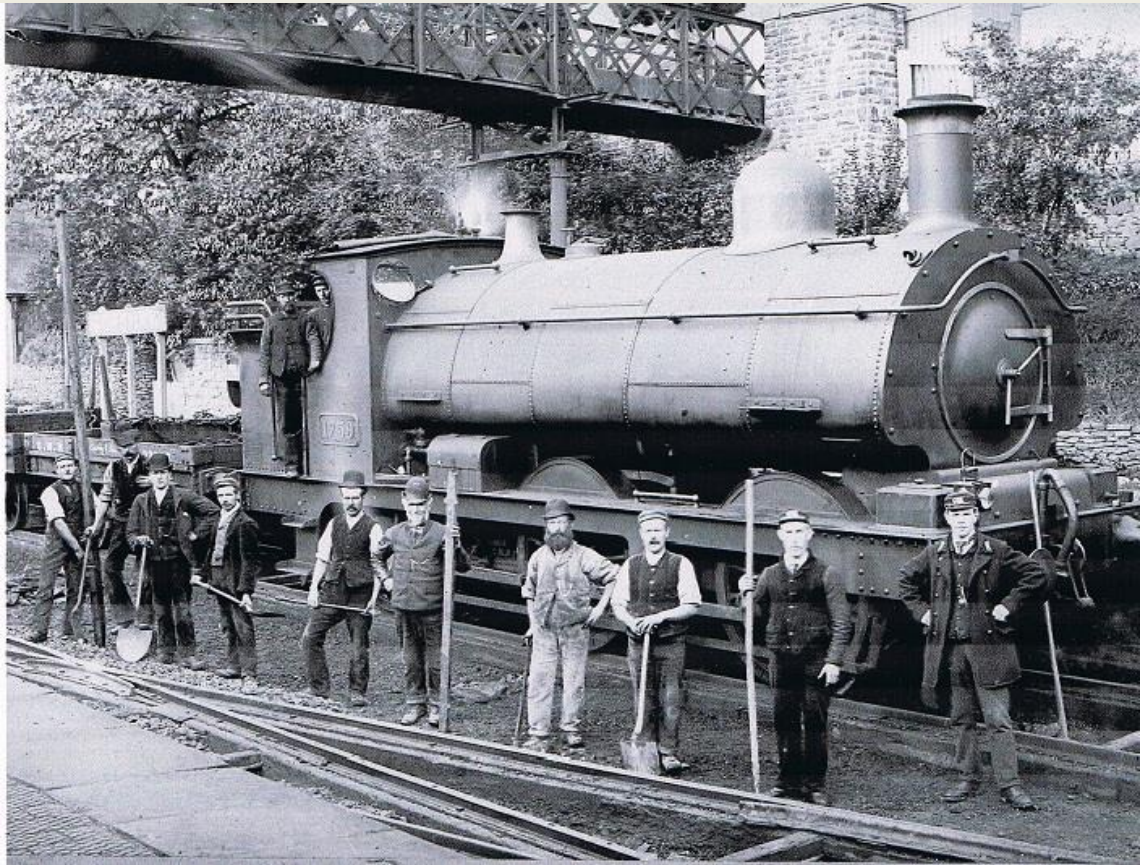
*With all best wishes for this festive season from the Officers  
and Committee Members*





### **An early photograph at Corsham Station.**

It is believed that this is the second earliest photograph taken of a train at Corsham station. It probably dates for 1893 or early 1894. The engine, an '1854' class of saddle tank, was built at Swindon Works in November 1892 and was later converted to a pannier tank in July 1912 and withdrawn from service, after 53 years of work, in November 1945. We can date this photograph fairly accurately by checking the track. Here we see rails laid on longitudinal sleepers, which date back to the broad gauge days and we know this was replaced by transverse sleepers in the Corsham area in 1893/4. With the driver and fireman on the footplate we have a selection of station staff being photographed and they include a porter, a shunter and various members of the Corsham permanent way gang. Information on the engine can be found in part 5 of 'Locomotives of the G.W.R.' published by the Railway Correspondence and Travel Society



Michael Rumsey

## Gospel Halls in the Corsham Area.

In May 1856 the first Gospel Hall was opened at Corshamside, now known as Neston, by a group of Christians wishing to worship in the brethren tradition. We must go back 24 years to 1832 when the then Vicar of Corsham, the Rev. John Andrew Methuen, renounced his curacy and sought fellowship among local gatherings of believers, which included Captain John Edridge of Pockeridge House. John Andrew Methuen was the 4<sup>th</sup> son of Paul Cobb Methuen and having studied at Oxford became Vicar of Corsham in 1819, and in 1822, married Louisa M. Fuller of Neston Park.

Meetings were first held at Pockeridge House and then transferred to the Old Malthouse at Corshamside until the building of the Gospel Hall which was opened in May 1856. Captain Edridge met the costs of building the hall as 'a place for preaching and a graveyard for the Society of Brethren', but sadly died before its completion.



**Photo. 1 [above left]** Daniel Davis was one of the first group of elders at Corshamside, from 1856. Daniel was Gamekeeper to the Fuller Estate and has a place in history for carrying from the fields of Neston Park, John Hanning Speke after he had accidentally shot himself dead during a shoot. Speke a cousin of the Fullers was a famous explorer in Africa who had found the source of the Nile.

**Photo. 2 [above right]** Henry Smith an early member and married at Corshamside in 1866. He became foreman of the Stone Quarries.

*Article continues on next page ....*





**Photo. 3** A gathering at Corshamside in 1903 on the occasion of the opening of the adjoining Sunday School rooms.

The hall was well attended over the years and a Sunday School commenced in 1873 and in 1903 the hall was enlarged to cope with the growing numbers attending the Sunday School and Bible Classes. Over the years, several generations of the Light, Davis, Webb, Sawyer, Smith and Poulson families supported the hall and in May 1926, they purchased the Primitive Methodist Church in Station Road to cope with numbers of worshippers resident in Corsham town.



**Photo. 4** Neston Gospel Hall



**Photo. 5** Corsham Gospel Hall

*Article continues on next page ....*

By 2011 it was decided to close the Neston chapel and concentrate all the work at Station Road. The Neston estate purchased the Gospel Hall at Neston and this has been converted into a home, but the Corsham Chapel retains the graveyard beside the chapel and this will continue to be used for the foreseeable future.



**Photo. 6 [above left]** Samuel Davis son of Daniel, he became a leading Bible teacher at Corshamside and was the Managing Director of Neston Glove Works.

**Photo. 7 [above right]** Hubert Hudd an early member and elder, still active in the 1970s.

I am grateful to Donald Smith who with others wrote an interesting history of the two chapels in 2006 and he also provided photographs.

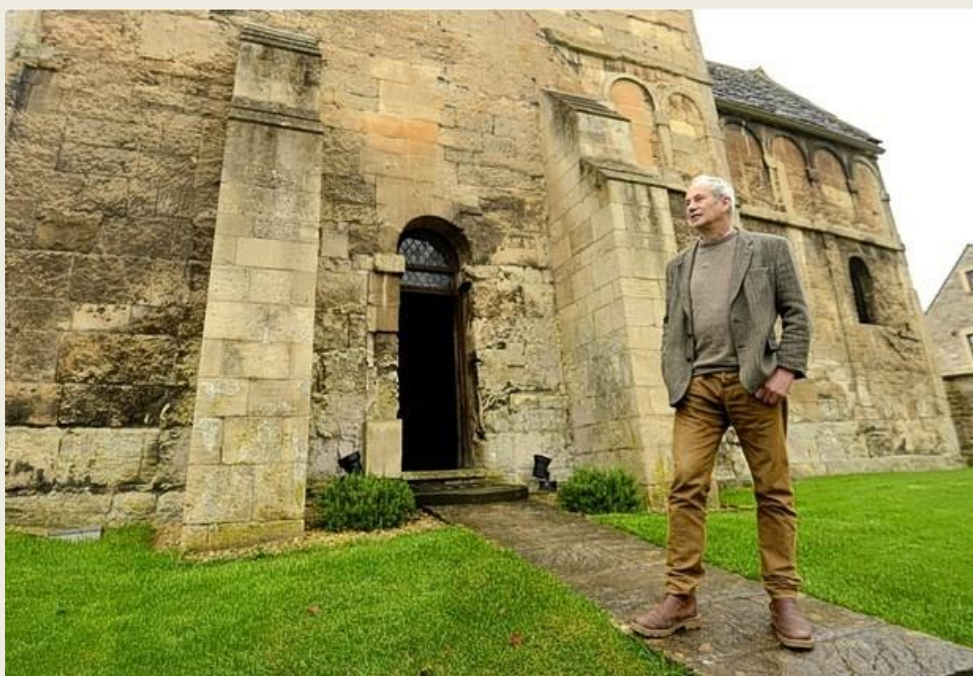
**Michael Rumsey**

### **The Buildings of Corsham, Julian Orbach - illustrated talk, 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016**

Julian is preparing the third edition of the Wiltshire volume of *The Buildings of England*. The Buildings of England series was created by Sir Nicholas Pevsner and is regarded as an unrivalled series of comprehensive architectural guides covering every English county from prehistoric times to the present day. Begun in the 1940s by Pevsner, the 46 volumes of the original Buildings of England series were published between 1951 and 1974. Pevsner's original volume on Wiltshire was published in 1963.

*Article continues on the next page ....*





Julian Orbach

Julian is an author and lecturer in architectural history. He was architectural adviser to the Victorian Society in 1975-7 and wrote the Blue Guide to Victorian Buildings in Britain, published in 1987. He worked on the listing of historic buildings in England until he moved to Wales in 1987 where he was similarly employed by Cadw. While in Wales he co-wrote three Welsh titles in The Buildings of Wales series, then in 2009 moved to Somerset to revise Pevsner's volume on South and West Somerset in the Buildings of England series. He lives with his partner in Bradford-on Avon, having moved there in June 2014 to begin revising the Wiltshire volume of the Buildings of England series.

Julian noted that Pevsner is buried in Wiltshire, in the churchyard of St Peter's Church, Clyffe Pypard, near Swindon. At the beginning of his career Julian worked with Pevsner which coincided with the end of Pevsner's. The first edition of the Wiltshire volume was a basic revision undertaken by Bridget Cherry in 1975 and very little new material was added. However, Julian considers that Wiltshire has very many good buildings and tried to persuade the publishers, Yale University Press, that two volumes were really needed but he lost that argument although he has been allowed a 'fatter' single volume.

Pevsner asserted that "Corsham has no match in Wiltshire for wealth of good houses, and there are a few of really high merit." Julian's comment was that he obviously came to it on a good day and that he clearly enjoyed himself in Corsham! Pevsner was concerned strictly with architectural highlights ie the great house and the parish church but in his revision, Julian wants to improve upon the predominantly estate/parish focus and add more vernacular buildings.

Article continues on the next page....



Pevsner left out lots of monuments due to space eg the Hulbert plaques which are of very high quality alabaster. Also, the 1960 sarcophagus and effigy of Lady Methuen carved in rose alabaster by Fritz 'Fred' Kormis in Corsham Church is regarded as notable. Sir Harold Brakspear warrants a big entry in the book because he did so much good quality restoration work and research in Wiltshire. Julian stated that certain aspects of Corsham Court bears comparison with Longleat.



Julian commented that some of the Methuens had a inclination to 'knock the house about', one of a number of examples that he gave was the moving of a fine fireplace out to an estate house in Easton. He stated that there were numerous examples and whilst acknowledging that change was inevitable, he just wished that a record had been made of from where displaced features had been sourced. Paul Cobb Methuen had been impressed by Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill gothic style and directed its architect John Nash to adopt similar lines for the reconstruction of the North Front at Corsham on which work began in 1797. Corsham Court had become, in effect, a mine of older architectural elements and Julian is inclined to think that Nash used some of those that were available.

In Julian's opinion the Hungerford Almshouses complex in Corsham (dated 1668) are probably the best of their kind in the country. In the High Street there is a building with a late 16<sup>th</sup> century doorway, and medieval windows which is probably Elizabethan. Julian remarked that there is lots of evidence of early buildings in the High Street.



Julian has concentrated on the 1690s heyday period up to the 1730-40s which is common to all cloth towns. Hoods dating to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century are a feature. No 90 High Street is a pure, very grand, 17<sup>th</sup> century house. Also notable is Pickwick Manor which is late 17<sup>th</sup> century but with a 14<sup>th</sup> century wing. Hartham Park is a Georgian manor house, originally designed by James Wyatt and completed in 1795. Hartham Park has retained rather fine fireplaces inside the house in contrast to Corsham Court where some were dispersed to other estate properties. The Grove is one of the best houses in the whole area [see photograph on cover]. Indeed, The Grove and Ivy House are fine examples of 18<sup>th</sup> century Georgian architecture. However, what's odd about Corsham and is true of all cloth towns is that it doesn't look towards Bath for its influences.

In seeking to broaden out the coverage of Pevsner's original and the Bridget Cherry revision, Julian is considering much more recent buildings ie the 1890s Priory Street estate houses, Sir Harold Brakspear's own Edwardian house and the Springfield Community Campus building "even though it looks like its waiting for a great aeroplane to land". He noted that the Information Systems and Services defence Intelligence complex, MoD Corsham was among the most expensive buildings in Europe at the time it was built and is worth considering for inclusion.

Julian ended by saying that the text of his revision will be available online for quite some time as he still has a great deal more of Wiltshire to cover before finishing in Salisbury and the south-east of the county.

**John Maloney**



## ‘Young’ Pickwickians, Part 2

12 Pickwick, as one of a pair with 14 Pickwick is a Grade II early-mid 18<sup>th</sup> century house built to a high standard in rubble stone with quoin dressings and stone slate roof. It is constructed in two hipped roof ranges, front and back. It has the classic Georgian layout of a terraced house, namely an entrance and right hand passage running beside a front parlour and another smaller parlour to the rear. There is also a small cellar. The staircase winds up to a first and then second and finally an attic floor on the right side of the build. Both the second and attic floors have one single large room across the width of the building at the front and a second smaller room on the left side of the building to the rear. Prior to 2010 there was a collection of rough outbuildings to the rear, as well as a much older separate construction, which is now used as the kitchen.



*The kitchen block which appears to have been part of a 17<sup>th</sup> century structure [see 1947 map below]*

The property was significantly repaired and improved in 2011 by Mr and Mrs Noel Avent. During that renovation many fine original features were rediscovered, including several stone fireplaces. The large inglenook found in the front parlour is a particularly fine example. Such features and also the hallway arch, original panelling etc., indicate that the property was conceived of as a ‘polite house’ suitable for the ‘Yeoman classes’ and likely to have been supported by servants.

*Article continues on next page .....*



*The front parlour with unblocked inglenook*



*Hall arch*

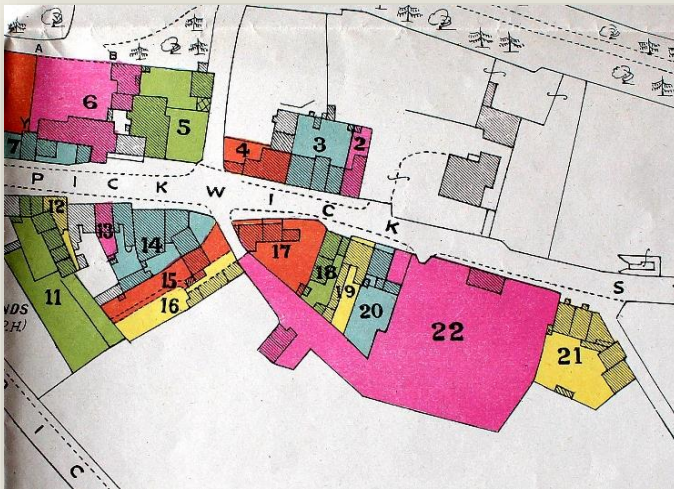
Although 12 Pickwick was not constructed as part of the adjacent old brewery, the property was linked to the brewery over several decades from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the 1920s. There was once a malthouse next to 12 Pickwick, on the east side. Part of its east wall can still be seen running up to the Bath Road frontage. It was partially demolished in the 1953 when the scrap business E S Cole & Partners required a larger entrance to the site for large vehicles.



*1839 Tithe Map [the Malthouse and Nos 12 & 14 are ringed in red]. The kitchen block is discernible as a separate structure and the large Pickwick Brewery building complex is located to the south east of 12 Pickwick. The structure to the north of the kitchen block was demolished in 1953.*



As remarked before, the part of the building now used as the kitchen is much older than 12 Pickwick and adjoined the structure to the north demolished in 1953. It is also possible to surmise that the remaining kitchen block is probably less than half the size it used to be and that another part of the original structure lay on the east side, within the brewery yard. If this is the case then that part of the structure would have been altered prior to 1820 when it is shown on a tithe map. The remains of the malthouse also reveal a clue that that building was constructed before 12 Pickwick. It is possible to see in the narrow gap between the remaining west wall of the former malthouse and the east wall of No 12 a blocked up window on the side of the malthouse. It is therefore a distinct possibility that this building including the part that is now the kitchen block can be dated to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The kitchen includes a small and distinctive cupboard usually considered in buildings of this date to have been a 'wig cupboard'.



The 1947 Map of Pickwick for the Goldney Sale. The 12 Pickwick lot is numbered 20. The structure to right of the house at the back is the kitchen block and the area in red above is the adjoining malthouse building demolished in 1953.



The blocked up window in the west wall of the former malthouse

Both 12 Pickwick and The Pickwick Brewery premises came under the joint ownership of the Dickson-Poynders in the mid-1850s when they purchased parts of the Conyers Estate and would have remained so until 1918 when Frederick Hastings Goldney bought the Pickwick property. Therefore, in the years when 12 Pickwick and the Brewery were linked through tenancy, the kitchen block would have joined No 12 as part of one property, sold as one unit and remains so today.

*Article continues on next page .....*

The historical significance of 12 and 14 Pickwick was officially recognised in December 1960 when these semi-detached buildings were given a statutory listing with a group value of Grade II. This would have helped support a preservation order placed by Calne & Chippenham Rural District Council in 1963 to prevent the owner of 14 Pickwick from replacing the ground floor windows. This was confirmed and supported by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government early the following year. In their letter they state that 12 and 14 Pickwick are of “special architectural and historic interest”.

12 Pickwick is a fascinating early to mid-18<sup>th</sup> century house originally built to a high standard which has enabled it to survive through to today. Similar houses nearby have date inscriptions of 1708, 1739 and 1745. The renovations carried out in 2011 achieved an appropriate balance of creating a modern home for 21<sup>st</sup> century living without losing the special historical features of the building.

A copy of *The History 12 Pickwick* in the Springfield Centre Library the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre and online at <http://www.pickwickassociation.org.uk/history.php>.

## John Maloney

### 'Old' Pickwickians

Our editor John Maloney's first article in the July Spotlight was of great interest to me as he referred not only to his own property, 12 Pickwick, but also the adjoining house No. 14. This was the home of my grandparents Bill and Rose Say for about 40 years - it may have been longer but I cannot be sure.

Through family research it appears that the Say family came to Wiltshire via Somerset sometime between 1819 and 1842, when g.g. grandfather Charles married a young lady from Melksham. Where Charles came from in Somerset, the men were farmers, agricultural labourers and miners in Somerset, so one wonders if Charles looked to the local stone mining industry when first they settled in Melksham and then Box.

The second son, James, moved to Corsham about 1874 and the family lived in Priory Road with, eventually, a family of 6 sons and 6 daughters. By 1900 the family was growing up and Alfred William (Bill) married Rose North in that year. He was employed as a 'quarry foreman' at the Copenacre site. At first they are registered on the census as living at Priory Road, but not with parents. But by 1911 they were living at '4 New Buildings, Bradford Road'. I would presume this address refers to the terraced cottages on the left hand side towards Rudloe and now known only as Bradford Road. However, in 1941 they were living at 14 Pickwick; but when and why did they move? Were they renting from the Brewery or later from the Pickwick Estate and Frederick Goldney? Was it to house an expanding family as they had 6 children by 1912?

*Article continues on next page .....*



One of their sons bought No 14. for his parents in 1948 at the Goldney family's 'Sale of the Pickwick Estate' and they remained in the property till about 1960.

I spent many happy times as a child playing with my cousin 'out in the Brewery!' Ah, happy days.

**Pat Whalley**

### **Heritage Open Days, September 2016**

We were disappointed in the response that we had for our events this year. Our programme has become bi-annual over the last few years because we have to rely on the good offices of the local population and resources in order to try and introduce interesting subjects and venues, consequently we have to repeat items at various times.

However, our visit to the Bath Stone Quarry Museum Trust was well received and we must thank David Pollard for allowing us access to his wonderful collection of artefacts from the quarry years.

Next came the visit to the Rudloe Stoneworks and again we had reduced numbers but, nevertheless, we received a splendid welcome and those who attended very much enjoyed learning of the work of this Company. Thank you to Paul Baker and his staff who looked after us so well.

The illustrated talk given by Ernest Hird in 2 sessions at the Lady Margaret Hungerford Almshouses was very well attended and the story of how these buildings came into being and how they have remained in use is one that is always fascinating. We should be extremely proud of this slice of our heritage in Corsham. Our thanks are due to Ernest and his wife for providing the talk and the illustrations, and to many of the Almshouse volunteers who worked hard to bring this item to fruition.

Our final day's programme included a visit to the Monks Park 'Dissenter's' Chapel, the members of the chapel are always delighted to welcome all visitors to this wonderful example of a 17<sup>th</sup> century chapel. Or one could join the ever popular 'Walk around historic Corsham' led by Dr Negley Harte. The weather was not so kind to those out on this day but we understand that those who braved the elements were pleased with the outcome. Our special thanks to Geoff Knapp and to Negley for ensuring these events went ahead. The organisation of this event was also helped a great deal by the staff of The Pound Arts Centre who printed the tickets and the commitment of the volunteer staff at the Tourist Information office who issued the tickets. Sub-committee members, Jean Beech, Margaret Shewring and Margaret Smith also acted as stewards at the events and I thank them for their support and help.

*Article continues on next page .....*

If anyone has any thoughts on how we might extend our programme for this event in the future we would be very pleased to hear your ideas.

**Pat Whalley**

## **CORSHAM COMMEMORATES THE WWI HOSPITAL AT THE TOWN HALL:**

### **'ABOVE AND BEYOND'**

The title says it all - the hospital was instigated by Lord Methuen, the Parish Council and the Red Cross. Professional nurses came from far and wide to run the hospital but the local people also worked extremely hard to support the venture. Many ladies volunteered as auxiliary nurses as part of the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD). Many men who were not eligible for service for whatever reason became medical orderlies and helped in many other ways to ensure the smooth running of the hospital.

In addition to the internal running, there were the ladies who knitted and sewed, repairing garments and sheets; ladies who came to hospital to clean; others took washing away to be laundered and ironed and many who came to cook for the patients and staff.

Outside the hospital there was a 'Daily Needs' board. This might ask for fruit, vegetables, eggs, or coal and wood, or blankets etc. and the Corsham population always did its best to fulfil these requirements. Truly a joint effort.



*Article continues on next page .....*



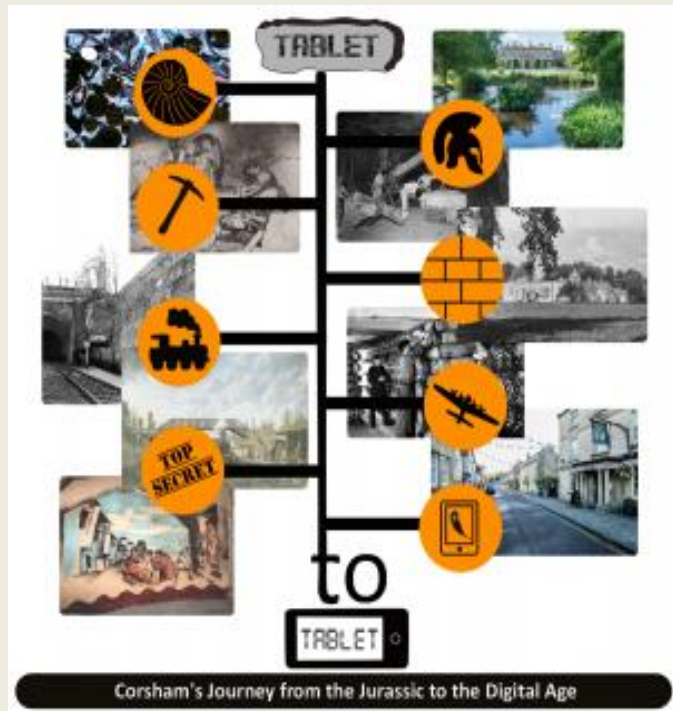
The Commemoration exhibition in October re-created a section of the main ward and mounted a display of the history of the hospital, using a range of sources from newspaper cuttings to personal stories. Emma Leith's poppy installation in the Town Hall was a sight to behold. There was music and drama from the period including Neston Panto Group 'entertaining' the patients; street theatre from Bath's Natural Theatre Company who were dressed as soldiers and nurses; and the Act Now Youth Theatre (who are based at The Pound) recreating the day the hospital opened. There were also Family History workshops, and Corsham's Knitting Group 'knitting for the troops', which had everyone searching for khaki and grey wool - not something used so much these days!

When Corsham organisations come together for these projects they really deserve our congratulations for a job well done.

**Pat Whalley**

### **Tablet to Tablet - Corsham's Journey from the Jurassic to the Digital Age**

At the Corsham Institute based at Hartham Park, a fascinating local history exhibition telling the story of Corsham's history over the last 170 million years, was open for two weeks during October and November and visited by over 250 people. The exhibition was curated by Corsham Institute's Creative Digital and Media Apprentices and featured over 100 images in 9 different spaces around the Courtyard buildings at



Hartham Park. The exhibition also featured artefacts from Corsham's stone mining heritage and the oldest object believed to exist in Corsham, an 80,000-year-old bison bone. Corsham's history in communications and stone mining made possible its digital infrastructure today and the exhibition told the story of the Box Tunnel, which in 1841, when it opened, was the longest tunnel in the UK; to the growth of the Bath Stone mining industry. From some of the mines, during the first and second World Wars, being used as stores for thousands of tons of munitions, to the development during the Cold War of the highly secret alternative seat of Government under Corsham, with capacity for 4,000 civil servants and the communications infrastructure intended re-build the country after any nuclear attack.

*Article continues on next page .....*

Local artists, art groups and history societies were involved in creating the Exhibition and many local, personal archives were accessed. Filming was also carried out underground in Corsham's only working stone quarry to bring the story up to date.

'**Tablet to Tablet**', provided a unique glimpse of the heritage that has enabled Corsham to develop into one of the most connected communities in the UK that has laid the foundations for the work of the Corsham Institute and from a glimpse at the comment cards, it was very well received! The adjectives used by visitors ranged from 'fascinating' to 'superlative', with one summing it up by saying, "Wonderful exhibition that really demonstrated the history and the diversity of our town and community."

The **Creative and Digital Media Apprenticeships** are part of Corsham Institute's commitment to Digital Corsham. They are on a rolling 18-month programme of full time work and training and it is hoped that future Apprentices will extend the scope of the exhibition, as well as digitising it, so it can be made available as a community asset for the whole of Corsham in the future.

For more information about the Corsham Institute their website is [www.corshaminstitute.org](http://www.corshaminstitute.org).

### **Martin Head, Director of Content, Corsham Institute**

**NB** Martin Head is talking to the society about *The Corsham Digital Hub* on the 25<sup>th</sup> November

### **Cream tea 2016**



This year's 'Cream Tea' on 19<sup>th</sup> August again took place at number 24, Lypiatt Road, Corsham, at the kind invitation of Victoria and Peter Blake.

My first CCS cream tea and how very nice it was! Many expressed their appreciation to Victoria and Peter for 'loaning their house' and thanks to the bakers who worked very hard to produce scrumptious cakes - Annabel, Victoria, Margaret and Joan who produced wonderful scones.

£115 was raised for the Tinnitus Society and Margaret received an appreciative acknowledgement from them.

The next social event will be the annual lunch at The Methuen Arms in February 2017.

**Cath Maloney**

## Governing Wiltshire: Almost a Thousand Years of Manorial Records, 1086-1922

Dr Bainbridge introduced her talk by setting the scene: the Manorial Documents Register (MDR) is maintained by the National Archives and provides brief descriptions of the documents and details of their locations. She pointed out that Manor Courts are presumed to have withered away under the Tudors once the parishes took over as centres for local administration. The MDR was set up in the 1920s but most records are still in the hands of the lords of manors or their solicitors.

For the last two years Dr Bainbridge has been working as the MDR Project Manager for Wiltshire and Swindon. The aim of her work has been to provide a revised record on an elective database. On 12<sup>th</sup> July the new Wiltshire and Swindon Manorial Documents Register went live on the National Archives Discovery site - <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/manor-search> .

Effectively, the system of manors helped to govern England until 1922. Like parish records, manorial records are an underused resource. In 1086, Domesday Book recorded information on all the landed estates of England. Many of these estates developed into the manors which controlled their tenants' lives for over eight more centuries. Manorial officials began writing records in the decades around 1200 when record-keeping became more common. The bailiff was the overseer of a manor or estate and directed the farming and other work. He would have manor reeves under him and be responsible either directly to his lord or to the steward or seneschal. The system of demesne farming continued into the 12<sup>th</sup> century and was important to the lords of the manor who ran their estates for themselves and not for the benefit of their tenants.

The manor was the basic unit of local government long before the parish took over this role around 1600. Manor courts registered tenancies and tried minor offences. Like councils today, they controlled licensed premises, weights and measures and markets. The lord's officials – reeves, bailiffs and agents – kept accounts of crop and stock yields, made extents, surveys and valuations, and drew maps. After the enclosure of common fields and pastures, a process which reached its peak around 1780, manor courts no longer controlled common agriculture, but they still registered tenancies of farms and cottages, recorded last wills and testaments for their tenants, and dealt with public nuisances like blocked ditches. Inevitably, changes in society in the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries greatly changed the roll of manorial courts, for instance, they used to organise collective farming.



To turn to Corsham, the majority of the records are post-1600 and some are post-1700. Perhaps most notably Corsham features in 1085 in that wonderful survey called Domesday Book, where it is recorded:

"The king holds Cosseham. Earl Tosti held it in the time of King Edward. There are 34 hides, but it renders geld for 18 hides. The land is 50 carucates. In demesne are 11 hides and there are 7 carucates and 10 serfs. There are 65 villans and 48 coscets and 9 cottars with 38 carucates. There are 2 mills worth 8/6, and 32 acres of meadow and 1 hide of pasture and 2 miles of wood in length and breadth. This manor with its appendages pays 30 pounds by weight. The English, however, value it at 31 pounds by tale. The abbey of St. Stephen of Caen holds the church of this manor with 2 hides of land [In the Exon Domesday this is returned at 2½ hides]. The land is 5 carucates. This is held by 3 villans with 6 coscets. It is worth £7 “.

Corsham was clearly an important estate area and adjacent to the very important Anglo-Saxon manor of Chippenham. The manor of Corsham was under the Chippenham hundred in the reign of King John. Corsham was long associated with royalty, for instance, in 1242 King Henry III gave this manor to his brother Richard, Earl of Cornwall and Edward III and his queen spent time there in 1346. Queen Elizabeth retained the lordship of the manor in her own hands for some years, but in 1572 granted the two parks, fish ponds, warrens, and advowson of the church, to her favourite, Sir Christopher Hatton. Shortly after Hatton became so impoverished that he was forced to sell Corsham and other estates. This sale resulted in the Corsham estate coming into the hands of Thomas Smyth, who was a Corsham man, and had made a huge fortune out of the farm of the customs of the port of London. He gave his Corsham estate to his third son Henry during his lifetime, and spent his remaining years in Kent. During the next 150 year the manor lands changed hands many times until 1770, when the whole of the three parcels were reunited in the hands of Paul Methuen, of Bradford.

Manorial records survive today in surprisingly large quantities, mostly dating from 1700 to 1922. Their location is recorded by the Manorial Document Register, set up by the Law of Property Act which abolished the legal powers of manor courts in 1922.

*Article continues next page...*

They are one of the most underused sources of family and local history, providing enough information to create short biographies of leading tenants from the 1200s on, and augmenting information from parish records and the Census. The revised MDR will provide greater public access to this important body of records, and this will be enhanced yet further by a legacy project of name-indexing the records which is being carried out by a group of volunteers on behalf of the Wiltshire Family History Society. Dr. Bainbridge expressed the hope that the Methuen papers may now be catalogued.

Dr Negley Harte is chair of the Wiltshire Manorial Records and Dr Bainbridge is a member.

## **John Maloney**

### ***Letters***

#### ***Article in the last issue***

Thank you for the opportunity to give a brief account of my career with British Railways in the last issue. I leapt over the 'hairy bits'.

The photo of me titled 'Young Don' shows my usual happy self just after the evacuees were billeted at home. I had a big bedroom with a double bed and had to share with two other boys and sometimes four if their friends stayed for the weekend. I had to assert territorial rights to my bed and thus could cause much temporary squabbling, until my father appeared waving a belt or stick about. After a few days we all settled down and I, being local, could show the other boys where to liberate apples, and where boys would never be welcome (most places!). I was called 'Old Don' from the age of about six as I took no interest in ball games, though rugby could be fun – you could lunge into anyone you didn't like.

1400 Class locos varied considerably. Nos 1400, 1402, 1422 and 1433 could be easy work. Number 1436 did not run well and was a difficult steamer. On one missing turn, the Auto train would make two trips to Calne, and on our return for the second time would take on water or run empty to Box. If the train got into a good gallop before reaching Thingley Junction the signalman would phone Corsham signalman to tell him "Old Don's on the Auto". This enabled the Corsham signalman to clear the way for a run to Box, saving much lever pulling as the train was backed to the siding at Corsham to allow another train to pass. When there was a clear run the trains would gallop from Chippenham to come out at Box in eight minutes, breakfast time before following the up fast calling at Mill Lane, Corsham, Chippenham then Calne.

**Don Rogers**

*Article continues next page...*

### ***Paving in Corsham High Street***

I have been working as a Landscape Designer for about 30 years and the standard of workmanship is the most abysmal that I have ever seen.

Laying re-claimed rough paving stones is not an easy job, but it is important to lay them with minimal joint widths, approximately 1cm apart. This will naturally, not be uniform everywhere. However, I have seen the guys who were laying the paving enlarge the gaps/joints and have even seen them chipping bits of the slabs to make the joints bigger. The joints are now in a range from 2cm to 10cm in places. If the mortar fails and these big joints open up, it will be dangerous for wheelchairs and elderly people to navigate

The mortar that has been used is far too white (the cement ratio being too high) which will be difficult to remove where it has splashed over the slabs. Only strong acids will clean it up. It has also been 'smeared' over the joints and looks like chewing gum.

As the mortar is raised above the joints, whenever it rains, the rain is not able to drain away properly and therefore leaves large puddles. This could constitute a real Health and Safety hazard when they freeze over in winter. It is interesting to see the difference between the old and newly-laid paving after a shower. It is really obvious then.

Corsham is renowned for its wonderful old high street and buildings and I am sure the Council finds it financially rewarding for film companies to film in the high Street. The southern end has now been turned into an eyesore with the recent re-laying and may put film companies off Corsham in the future. It will take many years for the paving to weather and the cement pointing to deteriorate.

Let's just hope the damage stops as soon as possible before the whole High Street is ruined.

***Jill Fenwick*** - [www.jillfenwick.co.uk](http://www.jillfenwick.co.uk)



## ***CORSHAM CIVIC SOCIETY 2017***

All meetings are held at the Pound Arts Centre (telephone 01249 701628) at 7.30, unless otherwise stated. Members £2, Non-Members £5, this includes free tea or coffee or £1 off a glass of wine. Guests are very welcome.

27 Jan: Councillor Mrs Ruth Hopkinson, Chairman of the Town Council, and David Martin, Chief Executive  
**'What is Corsham Town Council for?'**

---

24 Feb: Lunch at the Methuen Arms, 12.30 for 1.

---

24 Mar: Michael Rumsey, retired Head Teacher and Chairman of the Corsham Civic Society  
**'Parish Churches in North Wiltshire'**

---

28 Apr: TBA

---

19 May AGM to be held in the Town Hall, 7 for 7.15

---

23 Jun: Jeffery Thomas is Managing Director of the Hartham Park Business Centre  
**'Hartham Park: Past, Present and Future'**

---

28 Jul: TBA

---

22 Sep: Negley Harte, Michael Rumsey and others  
**'The History of Education in Corsham, 1668-2017'**

---

27 Oct: Visit to Westonbirt Arboretum

---

24 Nov: Dr. Negley Harte, retired university teacher, President of the Wiltshire Record Society, and former Chairman of the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society  
**'Corsham in Detail'**