

NEWSLETTER

Updating Hampshire's History

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VICTORIA
COUNTY
HISTORY



Hampshire

Group Walk in Dummer



Able led by Lyn Hardy, local resident, 14 members of the group explored the village of Dummer on a late August day. Starting at All Saints church we looked at medieval 'graffiti' in the porch, the rare example of a 15th century rood canopy above the chancel arch, one of the oldest pulpits in the country (about 1380) and marvelled at the size of the timbers supporting the gallery and belfry. Surrounding the church, and forming a central core to the village, lie the manor house (Dummer House), Manor Farm and the rectory from where the two aptly named streets, Up Street and Down Street, fan out. We admired the many thatched cottages, the oldest, *The Nook*, dated at 1423-4. House names reveal something of the history – *Foundry House*, *Keepers Cottage*, *The Old Brewery*, *Glebe Cottage*, *Well House*, *Post Office Cottage* and so on.



In Up Street we saw the duck pond, the village hall and site of the old school. In Down Street we found the former Primitive Methodist Chapel, now used as offices, the covered well house with tread wheel which may once have been powered by a dog and lastly The Queen Inn where we were suitably refreshed.

Sue Lane

CLUBS and SOCIETIES in and around BASINGSTOKE

The London Street Mutual Improvement Society

From the mid-19C until the early years of the 20C, London Street Congregational Church sponsored a well respected Mutual Improvement Society [MIS]. This was probably a successor to the Basingstoke Literary Association (1859 to 1864), with which London Street's minister, Revd Mark Wilks was closely associated. The MIS was certainly flourishing 40 years later:

'... this excellent society, which has behind it a record in which it might take pride, and before it, we hope, a career of further usefulness in the stimulation of ... [members] to improve their powers of thought and of speech.' (*Hants and Berks Gazette*, 1 November 1902).

Although such societies were not the sole preserve of churches, they were seen by them as a means of fostering fellowship and contributing to what today would be called 'lifelong learning'. A surviving membership card for 1901/02 indicates that the MIS was open to both sexes, with a majority of committee members being single women; there was an annual subscription; and London Street's minister was *ex officio* President. The programme consisted mainly of lectures and discussions covering a multiplicity of topics - historical, literary and political, interspersed with mock parliaments, social evenings and musical soirees. Meetings were frequently reported in the *Hants and Berks Gazette*, but disappointingly this was not the case when on 6 February 1902 members discussed what Basingstoke would be like in the Year 2000! A decade later, interest had waned and, although the MIS struggled on, it was but a shadow of its former self.

Roger Ottewill

Catch the Greased Pig

The Cliddesden, Farleigh Wallop and Ellisfield Horticultural Society first met in 1947, a time when many residents had enough land to allow self-sufficiency in vegetables and to keep the traditional pig. 'Catch the greased pig' was one of the features of the summer show, allowing whoever caught the pig to fatten it for Christmas. The society held four annual events: a spring show, a plant sale, a best kept garden competition and a summer show. It remains a popular club in 2017.



Sue Lane

Mechanics' Institute, 1841-1928

The aims of the Institute were to instruct members in science and useful knowledge by the means of lectures, conversation and readings as well as creating a library and museum and purchasing philosophical apparatus. Membership was primarily for boys who had left school and men, but ladies and children under the age of 14 were invited to certain lectures and social events. Lectures were held fortnightly in a room at the Town Hall, the first was entitled 'The Science of Arithmetic'.

One-time patron, Lord Portsmouth believed that the Institute was 'the best means of keeping working classes from the dangers of the beer house and the allurements of the tempting doctrines of Socialism and Chartism'.

Purpose built premises were opened in New Street in 1869 by Canon Charles Kingsley (author of *The Water Babies*). Here there were rooms for chess and billiard tournaments, dinners, dances and smoking concerts. A band was formed which played at the annual fêtes held in Malshanger Park, the home of another President and benefactor, Lord Wyndham Portal.

Interest in the lectures dwindled and membership fell away. Income came to rely on the hire of the billiard tables. Ladies were admitted as full members in 1890 but the original aims of the Institute were not being fulfilled. It became insolvent in 1928 when the Borough Council took over the building and maintained it as a free library and museum until 1969 when new premises were found.

Jennie Butler



Basingstoke Choral Society

Newspaper reports show that a choral society has existed in Basingstoke from 1887. Singers and musicians joined to form the Basingstoke Musical Society. This was dissolved in 1948 when the Basingstoke Choral Society was created. They had the honour of singing at the opening of The Anvil concert hall in 1994 and are still performing there with professional international soloists and orchestras.

Jennie Butler



Upton Grey in 1898 from the notes of Revd Healey:

'Coal Club': Following an old custom of giving a quarter of a ton of coal to every cottage family in the parish, about the same amount of bounty is given to the members of the Coal Club. A quarter of a ton costs £1 2/0d and members pay 14/- for widows, others 16/-. The Club is funded by donations from the gentry.



Sunday School Clothing Club: Started to encourage regular attendance. 3d a week minimum subscription. Each subscriber gets 1d a week added.

Parochial and School Penny Banks: Run by the Misses GF and HF Martin.

Parish Library: Found in a room attached to the vicarage. One of the most valuable things in the parish *"in the way of getting good literature into houses and keeping bad out."* Free to regular attendees at Sunday School. Others pay 1d a month.

The Band of Hope: Run by Mrs Seth-Smith. Very successful, nearly every child in the parish belongs.' *Trevor Hart*

St Michael's Bell Ringers



The parish church of St Michael's has a fine peal of eight bells, the oldest of which was cast in 1558. Bells are traditionally rung for services and for special occasions, such as royal visits, by a group of enthusiasts who meet during the week to practise and also have social outings, visiting other towers to ring. St Michael's has the honour of being the first tower in the world to have a lady ringer ring a peal; in 1896, Alice White, the 15 year old daughter of the tower captain, rang treble (the highest bell) in a peal of 5,040 Grandsire Triples lasting more than two hours. It is recorded on a board in the ringing chamber and was commemorated on the centenary by a band of ladies ringing the same peal. *Mary Oliver*

Basingstoke Church Lads' Brigade, c1914



During the late 19C and early 20C, various Christian denominations formed youth groups to encourage church attendance, promote temperance and fellowship organised on quasi military lines. These often included a uniform and a band to head parades. The Anglican version was the Church Lads' Brigade. Most of these organisations declined after WW1, but a Boys' Brigade (Methodist) is still active in Basingstoke in 2017.

Bob Applin

Park Prewett Hospital

Park Prewett Hospital, conceived as a mental hospital, opened in 1917 for war casualties and finally took mental patients in 1921. On a huge site, the hospital later housed over 1,300 patients and hundreds of staff at a time, a community separate from the town and needing its own social facilities.

In the 1930s patients and staff were involved in inter-hospital sports events, bowling, tennis, football and cricket. In 1954 the Renaissance Club was formed, a forum for patients and staff to discuss conditions and events in the hospital, and this led to the publication of the *Renaissance News*, which covered social, sporting and cultural activities. The magazine survived until late 1965 and was replaced twenty years later by the *Park Prewett Hospital Staff Social Club Magazine*.

A branch of the Women's Institute was opened in the hospital in 1963 and lasted until 1976, and during the same period a League of Friends was formed to raise money for social and community events.

The hospital was closed in a piecemeal way by late 1996 and is now the site of the new Rooksdown Parish, a modern housing development. *(with thanks to Malcolm Isted) Barbara Large*



The night they called it May's Bounty

The Basingstoke Cricket Club (now the Basingstoke Sports and Social Club) was founded on 4 May 1865 at a meeting in the *Wheatsheaf*. Cricket has been played on the piece of land that was known as the Folly since at least 1855. In 1880, Thomas Burberry, who owned the land, gave the Club notice to quit, so that the land could be sold for building plots. It looked as if the Club would lose its ground. However, the President of the Club, John May, the brewer, saved the day by buying the land with his own money. May had to pay around £500 more than the market price in order to beat off the building speculators. Buying the Folly and laying a cinder cycle track cost him £1,800.

On 17 May 1881 the Club held its first annual dinner since May bought the Folly. The dinner was held in the Town Hall. Judging from the number of toasts, each of which was followed by a speech, which gave time for people to refill their glasses, and the number of songs that were sung, it is unlikely that anybody went home sober that night. At least 14 songs were sung during the proceedings. John Lamb of Lamb and Brooks, solicitors, during his speech, as reported by the *Hants and Berks Gazette*, said:

'It had been a source of great pleasure to him to witness the presentation that evening to Captain May, because one seldom heard of such generosity as had been displayed by that gentleman. Up to the present time the cricket field had been known as the Folly, but he thought that it would be known now by the name of "May's Bounty" (laughter).'

The name stuck. It is now the name of the cricket field. The road that runs alongside was later re-named Bounty Road, and the *Cattle Market Inn* is now called the *Bounty*. And this was all due to a half-drunken jest made in the course of a merry evening.

Bob Clarke

VCH Hampshire Work in Progress

Hampshire VCH group is currently researching the history of Basingstoke and its surrounding parishes.

We have published *Mapledurwell* (2012) and *Steventon* (2016), are due to publish *Medieval Basingstoke* shortly and *Cliddesden, Hatch and Farleigh Wallop* will appear in 2018. The Hampshire section of the national VCH website, <http://www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/counties/hampshire>, has draft sections about Basingstoke and many of the surrounding villages. We have recently added sections on the manorial history of Winslade with Kempshott and Congregationalism in Old Basing. The religious history of Herriard will follow very shortly.

The *Explore* website, <http://www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/explore>, is used to publish short articles about interesting local people, places and themes and transcriptions of wills, inventories, censuses and other documents used for research. Recently added items to the *Explore* website include: the Basingstoke Town Sanitary Reports for 1866 in all their graphic detail; histories of Basingstoke Post Offices, the Mechanics' Institute, All Saints Church and Bible Christians in Basingstoke, transcriptions of 16C Old Basing wills and inventories and Overton Poor Law. Forthcoming items are the history of utilities in Basingstoke and Rectors of Dummer.

