

BASINGSTOKE ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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Reg. Char. No. 1000263

ANNUAL DINNER AT BCOT - Thursday 25th February

There are still a few placings left for this popular Society event. Why not join us for a fine meal and good, friendly company? We will especially welcome newcomers to this evening, so please telephone Tim Herrington on 01256 322090 **now**. The total cost of the three-course meal is fixed at £13.50. Dinner will be served at 6.30pm; please arrive between 6 and 6.15pm.

TRAINING DIG: EASTER 1999

A further training excavation has been arranged at Church Lane, Worting, by kind permission of Dr Richenda Power. This will take place, as in previous years, over the Easter weekend, 2nd - 5th April. If you are interested in taking part, please give your name to **David Score**, who will direct the dig (01252 548591) or to **Mary Oliver** (01256 324263).

LOCAL SOCIETIES CONFERENCE 1999

This Conference is being jointly organised by the Andover Local History & Archaeology Society and the Hampshire Archaeology Committee and it will be held **at Harroway School Hall, Andover on Saturday, March 20th**. Doors open (for arrangement of displays) at 9 am, talks beginning at 10 am and the Conference dispersing at 3.30 pm.

Entrance is free, and booking forms will be available shortly on which ploughman's lunches can be booked in advance. Apply to Hampshire Archaeology Committee, Historic Resources Centre, 75 Hyde Street, Winchester SO23 7DW (01962 848269)

The provisional programme includes:

- ◆ a contribution from the Andover Local History & Archaeology Society
- ◆ Richard Whaley of NEHAS on "The Guildford, Neatham and Winchester Roman road
- ◆ S Waight on "Hampshire Estates of Corpus Christi College, Oxford
- ◆ Graham Scobie on "The Search for Alfred: Excavations at Hyde Abbey, Winchester
- ◆ C Gifford about metal detecting
- ◆ Barbara Applin on "**Basingstoke Talking History - an ongoing local study**".

This promises to be a varied and stimulating day - and we hope you will come to support our own contribution too! We will be mounting a small display and hope to sell some books.

MILLENNIUM T-SHIRTS

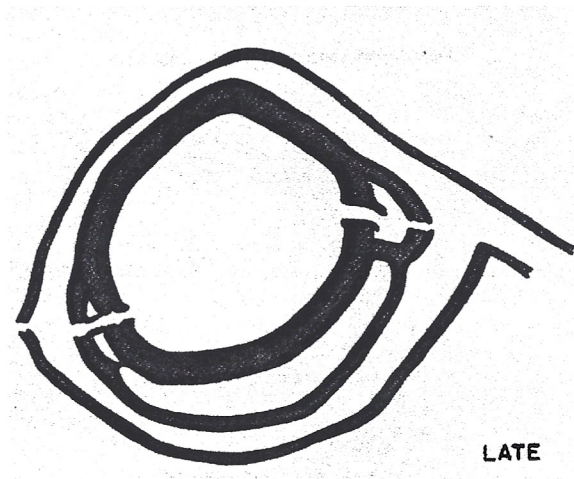
We hope to arrange for a supply of T-shirts to be manufactured in time for the Millennium. Many of you still sport the 25th Anniversary shirts with the XXV logo. Our first thought is to use the same outer circle as before but with the letters MM in the middle. What do you think ? Let us know !

PHOTOGRAPHIC DISPLAYS

Bearing in mind that the recent photographic competition produced very few entries, we thought we would give you a rest from a direct competition this year. Instead, we propose to exhibit any suitable photographs, or collections thereof, at our monthly meetings on the display boards. **We invite you to bring to any meeting** display material which may be of general interest.

DANEbury AND ITS IRON AGE LANDSCAPE

Mary Oliver



I recently attended the above lecture by Professor Barry Cunliffe at the Royal Archaeological Institute. Over the years, we in Hampshire have been able to watch this impressive programme develop: the excavation of Danebury itself, the publication of both academic and popular reports, the display of finds in the splendidly didactic Museum of the Iron Age in Andover and, more recently, the "follow-up" programme of excavation of sites around Danebury to study the relationships between them. Barry Cunliffe gave a masterly summary of this huge amount of material which, if I have to summarise yet again, may perhaps be described as even more complicated than expected!

At the same time as the Danebury dig, the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments made a map of the area around, showing all the sites visible on aerial photos. From these a selection was

made of different types - hillfort, enclosure, field system and banjo enclosure - at different positions and on different soil types - to try to answer questions on specific themes. They were:

- the early organisation of the landscape, with field systems and linear ditches
- the variety of settlement types in the Early Iron Age
- the reorganisation at about 300 BC
- the further disruption in the Late Iron Age.

Work is progressing on post-excavation reports and synthesis and we must await the publication for more information, which is likely to add as much to the story of the Iron Age in Hampshire as the Danebury report itself.

Meanwhile, one or two snippets I found fascinating :-

Danebury, Figsbury, Bury Hill, Quarley and Woolbury: all these hillforts would appear to have begun as single bank and ditch enclosures with two opposed entrances. But inside they were quite different: Danebury more intensively occupied, Bury Hill with **no** features so far identified, and Quarley and Woolbury somewhere between. Why such a difference? Was the enclosure itself the important thing?

Houghton Down had settlement earlier and contemporary with Danebury, with large round houses, high status pottery and even a chunk of iron ingot as a ritual offering in a pit, all indicating a higher status site than Danebury. What does it say about the status of hillforts?

Around 300 BC Danebury was more intensively occupied and defended, as the other hillforts were abandoned - a central place within a territory. Territoriality was clearly important - saucepan pots of the St Catherine's Hill, Winchester type (found around Basingstoke) just do not occur in the Danebury area. There must have been some kind of frontier - perhaps the Quarley linear ditch?

In the Late Iron Age, Bury Hill was brought into use again with a further defensive ditch. The occupation was unlike that at any other site studied, with 46% of the animal bones found being horse, and also lots of horse equipment found. This is of the same type as that made at Gussage All Saints in Dorset, where the broken moulds were found. Some of the distinctive horse gear has been discovered in burials in East Yorkshire and it raises the interesting possibility that Bury Hill was a kind of specialist production centre for a very prestigious product - the trained chariot horses, with all their equipment and vehicles - which could have been traded or exchanged over a wide area. Did they form part of the host of 4,000 chariots who met Julius Caesar in 55 BC?

This lecture was most enjoyable - elegantly presented, well illustrated and thought-provoking. It was also good to hear that Professor Cunliffe's interest is firmly committed to the next state - the continuity of this landscape into the Roman period. Work at Houghton Down, Grateley, the Iron Age site which was succeeded by a Roman villa, will continue this Summer. There will be an Open Day so, if you would like to visit the dig, watch this space!

HAMPSHIRE BUILDINGS PRESERVATION TRUST

Margaret Bailey

On Friday, November 20th the Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust held their AGM at the Haymarket Theatre, Basingstoke. Barbara Applin and I took advantage of the opportunity to set up a stall and sell copies of the Felgate book and other publications of the BAHS. It seemed a very appropriate venue, since members of the HBPT were to be given a conducted tour of Old Basingstoke by Bill Fergie in the afternoon.

After the AGM we were fortunate to be able to hear a talk by Marcus Binney, OBE, of SAVE Britain's Heritage. He focused on the work by SAVE to promote the renovation and development of buildings formerly used as mental institutions. With the help of very interesting slides, he showed how many such buildings, though of great architectural worth, had been neglected, vandalised and often demolished to make way for car parks, industrial sites etc. He then went on to tell of SAVE's work in encouraging the development of such buildings and their grounds, to provide quality dwelling places, hotels and in one instance a nursery school. He stressed that such well-designed and, in many cases, beautiful buildings could be adapted for modern usage and that the often extensive land around them could provide a pleasant environment, often lacking in modern housing developments.

It was certainly a surprise to realise just how many of these establishments are in existence throughout every part of Britain. Add to these the many military establishments which have become redundant, and you have an extensive resource of historical and practical value.

Mr Binney's talk was very well received and he answered a number of questions from the audience.

We sold several books and a video!

NORTH EAST HAMPSHIRE HISTORICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

NEHHAS cordially invite interested members of BAHS to join them in their annual excavation:

"Excavation at Heckfield, Hampshire of a post-medieval manor house from 29th May to 13th June by NEHHAS, Director Geoff Hoare. For further information please contact Don Woolhead, Field Secretary, telephone number 01276 33056".

Members who came to the Society's Christmas Party heard a small selection from our taped interviews. There were some surprises - one interviewer recalling mules being used in 1918 to take hay to the railway for transport to France, another talking of the World War II prisoners of war he escorted to farm work from their camp where Homebase now is. I found it difficult to choose which extracts to use.

But I was glad I'd done that when Chris Horrocks - who, in addition to being a leading light in our Society is Chairman of the Oakley & Deane Women's Institute - asked me to be a last-minute fill-in speaker. I was given a warm welcome - three of our **Basingstoke Talking History** group were members of that WI anyway! And Paulline Williams came to give me moral support - and sell books, which she did with her usual panache and efficiency.

I shall have a half-hour slot at the **Local Societies' Conference** in March (see page 2) to talk about our work, and we shall put on a small display - and hope to sell yet more books. So I'd be glad to hear from anyone who is planning to go to that Conference.

Going Down Church Street to the Felgate Bookshop is continuing to sell well, and we hope that members will help to make it known even more widely. We haven't yet got funding for the **National Health** book, but we're using the time to continue interviewing and transcribing. So there's still time for a few more interviews on health matters before or just after the start of the National Health Service if anyone has suggestions to make. We're collecting short items too on what people expect or would like to see in the National Health Service in the future. These needn't necessarily be recorded on tape, so I'd be grateful if as many people as possible would send in short comments NOW (to 138 Old Kempshott Lane, Basingstoke, RG22 5EN).

We have joined the **Oral History Society** and receive their Journal and notices of conferences etc.

If you would like to join us, to do interviews, synopses, transcription or associated research, please ring me (01256 465439) so that I can tell you when the next meeting is.

A SOCIETY OF LITERATURE 1859 -1864

Diana Macmarill

In May 1859 a committee met in Basingstoke to draw up a set of Rules for a Society of Literature, shortly to be called the Basingstoke Literary Association (sometimes other titles are used, such as Institute, Society or Institution).

The early nineteenth century had seen a proliferation of such associations - Literary Institutes, Philosophical & Scientific Institutions, Athenaeum - titles were varied. They had chequered careers: great enthusiasms, large donations of cash, books, and collections of mineral, entomological, and natural history specimens. They were often succeeded by financial collapse, resuscitation, modification of Rules and purposes. Renting of rooms, whether in inns or above offices was often followed by the establishment of specially built premises with impressive frontages as in Liverpool, Newcastle and Exeter. Basingstoke's Society was a more modest effort, concentrating on literary topics, providing books and journals rather than scientific material.

This first meeting in May, 1859 was held in the School Room of the London Street chapel (now the United Reform Church). The purpose of the Society, as set down in the minutes, was 'the mutual improvement of its members, by means of a Reading Room, Lending Library, Classes, Lectures etc.' At this period there were no 'public' libraries in the modern sense, only subscription libraries, mainly commercial, or church and learned society collections where these existed, available only for the few.



Six classes of members were proposed. These can be summarised as offering a full membership with voting rights to men of some means, who would therefore have control of the Society; (a minimum subscription of 21s per annum); admission to lectures but no votes to others, with quarterly rates to encourage those unlikely to afford an annual payment, while ladies were admitted on gentlemen's tickets, or on a reduced rate of 4s per annum. Youths under 16 were admitted to lectures at lower fees of 2s per annum or 6d per quarter without voting rights. The wish to encourage young men into education was frequently stressed in these Societies. Many such bodies did not admit women at all, until later in the century, with much time spent debating whether or not they should be allowed.

Initial joining fees were often needed to set up the society : Basingstoke stated that 'any person desirous of joining may do so by paying his subscription and an entrance fee of 1s on application to the Secretary.' Elsewhere, members had to be elected by votes of a proportion of existing members.

Officers were appointed and voting procedures laid down. A book was to be kept in the Reading Room for readers' recommendations of new books and other suggestions. The Rev. J.M.Wilks, a

Fellow of New College, London, and Pastor of the London Street Chapel, became President, Messrs. Haslam and Chandler Vice-Presidents, with secretary (Mr Wheatley), treasurer (Mr N E Dunn dec'd [?]- and librarian (Mr G Barton) appointed. The members of the first committee were Mr Angell, Mr Hill, Mr G B Musselwhite, Mr Webb, Mr Curtis (Chin) [?], Mr Hallam, Mr Taplin, Mr A Doman and Mr Milward. More decisions were taken at the June committee meeting when 'it was resolved that the Reading Room be opened at six o'clock and close at 10, with the Librarian, [paid £5 p.a.] to attend for issue and exchange of books on Mondays and Thursdays, 8 - 9'. Sub-committees were formed for the Library, Classes, and Collecting (of subscriptions).

The following week it was agreed that the YMCA should be asked to transfer their library to the Society, and the library committee would endeavour to obtain books as gifts or loans. The editions of *Punch*, *Saturday Review*, *Times*, and *Illustrated London News* were to be kept and bound for the library,



'and the other papers to be sold quarterly in advance, to be, delivered the third day after publication.' This was a time when newspaper tax rendered the price prohibitive for many people. Classes were set up for Discussion, Singing, Drawing, and YMCA (religious studies). It was also suggested that a class of elementary studies (English, Arithmetic) open to the public, be set up. Gentlemen had volunteered their services as teachers. This relates to the problem met elsewhere, and especially in the Mechanics' Institutes, of those unable to profit from classes and lectures because they lacked the basic education.

The number of members at June 13, 1859 was 92. An interesting reflection of monetary values is shown by the provision of £10 to the library committee to obtain 100 volumes within a month! The next need was for suitable premises, and by November 1859 'the house in Church Street had been obtained at an annual rent of £18' with a tenancy from Christmas. 'Mr. Haslam and Mr. Angell agreed to become the tenants of the house', rented from Mr. Luke Redgrove (the exact location is not known). Repairs and improvements were needed, which led to debts for the young Society.

The committee meeting of January 10, 1860 was held in the new rooms, when it was decided to convert the back premises into a Smoking Room, (not always acceptable in other towns). By March, a Club Room had been opened, with coffee supplied every night at 1d per cup, and furnished with '1 doz. chairs, 2 spittoons, an ink stand, 1 chess board and men, and two draught boards & men.' Classes now included Geometry & Elocution. One room was to be let on alternate evenings to the Temperance Society. The *Reading Mercury* of March 17 reported: 'This room is specially intended for the benefit of working men, who may smoke their pipe, drink their coffee, and read the latest news at a charge of not quite a penny a week. Working men must see, on reflection, that evenings quietly spent there, will be profitably employed. There is no wish to deprive anybody of innocent enjoyment, but the Association is very anxious to protect men from those methods of amusements, which too often make them wretched, and their homes comfortless.' This was not included in the aims of the Society; perhaps the attitudes implied in this report had some bearing on the problems of recruitment of working men as members.

A glimpse of the conditions which members enjoyed is shown by a minute of August 17 1860 : 'Resolved that a better supply of gas be obtained for the Reading Room. That the windows be made to open at the top, that the lower panes of the windows on the ground floor be frosted... Basingstoke Literary Association to be painted on the window of the library.' In September, a request went to the Temperance Society 'that their Drum and Fife Band be carried on elsewhere, many complaints having been made from members.'

By this time, finance was a problem, and efforts were made to ensure better collection of subscriptions, and to attract new members. Unfortunately the Minute Book does not show the accounts or membership figures. A rare surviving sub-committee minute reads: 'Dec.9 1860: Mr.Hallam very kindly consented to take of the Secretary 40 quarterly tickets, which he stated he should dispose of among the friends of the Association whom he should request to sell them if possible, and if not, to present them gratuitously to working men with the hope that they would be induced in future to purchase them themselves; by these means a considerable addition to the number of members would probably result.' Again, there is no follow-up to this minute. In August 1860, the programme of activities was listed: a soirée, three lectures, a concert, and an excursion by train to Hampton Court - the last produced a welcome balance of £4.6.6. while the soirée made £1.12.8.

The soirée was a popular event in all kinds of societies, as it combined an evening's entertainment for its members with an opportunity for publicity in the community, and the hope of raising money for the funds. The *Reading Mercury* (December 1859) publicised an earlier one: 'On Thursday evening a soirée will take place at the London Street School room, in aid of the fund for improving the premises in Church Street ... The Chair will be occupied by the President, the Rev Mark Wilks, tea, coffee etc. will be provided ... Several ladies and gentlemen have very kindly consented to assist on the occasion ... during the evening there will be a reading from C. Dickens' 'Christmas Tales' and amateur performances of vocal and instrumental music... some little curiosity is excited as to the amateur performances, but it may be confidently asserted... that talent of no ordinary kind will be found among them.'

This advance notice was followed by an enthusiastic report : 'the room most beautifully decorated with banners, flowers, and evergreens in all sorts of devices. The general arrangements were quite perfect ... no confusion was visible ... the wants of the large party assembled were well attended to, and everybody must have been pleased with the amusement afforded.'

Money was also raised by the letting of rooms; in the summer. of 1862 it was agreed to hold Penny Readings there, and a sub-committee was formed to oversee this. They asked for, and received, permission to paper the Club Room. Then the Primitive Methodists asked for the use of the Smoking Room for religious worship, on Sundays - '5/- p[er].d[ay] includes use of gas for evening service, cleaning and use of such forms as were there' - while the Wesleyan Minister at Winchester asked to rent the large room, for £10 p.a.

The main activity to promote the 'mutual improvement' of its members was the series of lectures, arranged in the winter season, and usually held at the Town Hall. The speaker and subject were frequently announced in the *Reading Mercury* and reports -often long and verbatim - appeared the following week. The President, Rev. Wilks, was in great demand, as was Washington Wilks on such

subjects as Ships and Steam Ships, with special reference to the Great Eastern: 'he was peculiarly qualified to lecture upon such a subject as this, having accompanied the monster. ship from the Thames to Portland, from there to Holyhead, and back again to the Southampton water where she now lies ... It is believed that he intends accompanying the Great Eastern on her first journey to America...' He later lectured on The Civil War in America and The Pilgrim Fathers. The President showed a wide range of interests: The Fools of Shakespeare; The Reign of Queen Mary; Work and Wealth; The Poet Tennyson . The reporter said of the last: 'The lecture was illustrated throughout by extracts from the best of his poems, rendered in a manner which presented to the audience all their best points and most striking features' -perhaps implying some relief at this selection! Other lecturers were George Grossmith, Justin Macarthy, Mr .Jabez Inwards on Life Assurance, 'urging upon all the positive necessity of making that provision for families in case of death,' the Rev.R.Halley D.D., President of New College, on Memphis, 'being the result of personal observation among its ruins.'

W H Massey, M.P. for Salford spoke on Statesmen and Orators of the Last Century, while E .Copes Whitchurst Esq. 'delivered at the Town Hall a most practical and excellent lecture entitled "A Life of Usefulness, a Study for Young Men"' . The reporter observed that 'it was not one of that class termed "popular", or of a character very attractive to those for whose benefit it was peculiarly designed.' It is surprising that so far no bills or tickets for these lectures have surfaced; the only record is that of the newspaper.

In October 1863 it was agreed that the lectures for the season would be held at the London Street and Oat Street (Wote Street) Chapel schoolrooms alternately . No reason was given - had the Town Hall become too expensive, too large, or not available?

Another educational activity of the Society was the holding of a Discussion Class, formed in 1859, but given greater publicity in the *Reading Mercury* in 1861. Debates included: That the present Government is not worthy of confidence; That the British Museum should not be opened on Sundays - carried by a majority of four, and a lively discussion occurred on March 6, when Mr.Wheatley (Secretary) proposed that 'Manhood Suffrage is more desirable than limited suffrage'. 'A slight misunderstanding arose as to the real meaning of one point in the subject, causing rather a warm debate between some of the members ...' a. majority of one in favour of the motion. The *Reading Mercury* reporter, announcing the following week's topic - 'Would the Constitution of England be improved by the Abolition of the House of Lords?' added: '-a question which will, we think, be very quickly decided in the negative.' Intriguingly, there was no further report in the paper for the next two weeks so we remain in suspense - could he not bear to report a different result? The last subject of the season (May 24) was 'Which Country possesses the greater amount of liberty - England or America?'. Mr.G.F.Dunn, (Treasurer of the Society) proposed America, but he was defeated by a very large majority.

These Discussions, and other classes, were held in their own Church Street premises, smaller numbers being involved. One would like to know more of the composition, social and educational, of the groups participating.

Some lighter activities were introduced: another soirée in October 1861 included a reading from Pickwick Papers (by Rev. Wilks), dialogues and recitations, performances by the music class and band, comic songs. The *Reading Mercury* was very approving: 'the most pleasant and successful

character ...' especially the tea - 'the room was well arranged, being divided into about a dozen sections, the wants of each section being attended to by a lady, who presided at a tea-urn, and dispensed refreshment ... the ladies proved to be capital hostesses, and it was very evident that their home practice had fully qualified them for the discharge of this important public duty - or rather, pleasure, because both hostess and visitor appeared heartily to enjoy the occasion.' What the ladies thought of this patronising report has not been preserved.

In February 1862 a grand vocal and instrumental Concert was held at the Town Hall, fully advertised by the *Reading Mercury*, and even more fully reported afterwards - 'the performances of the Volunteer band were most excellent ... only attained by steady attention to the instruction of band-master Powell...The Association Music class is deserving of all praise; their instructor, Mr. Hoskins, has evidently pursued a good method of teaching.'

Unfortunately such delights were not sufficient to maintain the Society. Finance here as in similar bodies throughout the country, was a perennial problem, and falling audiences did not help. Already in September 1860 the Treasurer reported the probable position of the Association at the end of the present session - the receipts would not meet the expenditure by about £30. Extra subscriptions were sought but only £24.10.0 was added. On Nov.19 1862 the committee reported that 'lectures were badly attended - great apathy and indifference.'

In April 1863 there was a debt of £40, and the lettings did not have much effect on the finances. The number of lectures was cut. Yet as late as November of that year the committee agreed that 200 catalogues of the Library should be printed, implying a degree of support from the membership. In January 1864 an annual income of about £40 was noted, while the debt was £18.8.9. It was agreed to take loans from members to clear this, but next month hope was abandoned. 'Mr. Angell and Mr. Bartlett met with some sympathy as regards the continuance of the Association, but not sufficient to guarantee its solvent continuance and ... they recommend the winding up of its affairs.' This motion was held over, while a further approach was made to the Methodists for renting rooms, but it was then 'Resolved ... That it is the opinion of the committee this Institute should be discontinued.' At a Special General Meeting in March 1864 Mr. Angell summarised the past history of the Association (unfortunately not kept in the Minute Book) pointing out 'the different amount of Income from special efforts' and the applications for donations. It was unanimously resolved 'that this Association be discontinued ... to give notice to leave the premises at midsummer.' Many votes of thanks concluded the business.

In May and June sales of contents were held. The Minute Book recorded that the stock of furniture and fittings raised £18; 260 volumes in the library were on sale at about 1/- per volume; 45 yards of matting at 4 [pounds], 3 tables for £2.7.6, chairs for £1.16. The rest of the sale brought in £24.7.2., leaving a final deficit of £4.8. It is a pity that such detailed accounts were not given in the minutes throughout the Society's existence; the only record of membership was in June 1859 - when it was 92 and in June 1860, when it was 103.

Do these omissions from the Minute Book suggest inadequacies in the running of the Society? Many such groups suffered from change of officers, overburdened Secretaries, committee members involved in competing societies. Minute Books elsewhere are mostly more informative, and usually contain pasted-in Treasurer's Reports, and reports of sub-committees. The AGM reports appear briefly in the *Reading Mercury*, but not in the Minute Book, while the few sub-committee minutes

written at the end of the book are not fully dated. (There are, a few references to lack of a quorum for some meetings.)

There is no doubting the enthusiasm of these gentlemen who were involved in the setting up and running of the Society but there were many difficulties facing them. The Mechanics' Institute had been started in 1841, moved to New Street in 1869 and is well reported in the *Reading Mercury* for its lectures and social occasions. (including a soiree in 1861 when dancing continued to 5 a.m.!) Their membership would certainly have overlapped, though there is some doubt whether they did in fact attract artisans. Throughout the country there was an increasing number of alternative recreational, including political, groups, and Basingstoke no doubt had several such.

A question remains as to whether the original aim of such societies could in fact be achieved: are they for the benefit of educated gentlemen who wish for intellectual stimulus and conversation with like minds, or are they designed to improve the lot of the working class by offering access to education which has not been available otherwise? Can these two aims work together? In 1859, at the first session, the *Reading Mercury* reported that 'there is a good working committee who are most active in their endeavours to increase its prosperity and extend its influence; classes have been formed in connection with it although unfortunately these classes have general [sic] proved in the end to be decided failures everywhere in Basingstoke, as the members of other institutes will readily admit.' Or in other words, can adult education be imposed by good intentions?

Note

The sources for this article. are the Minute Book of Basingstoke Literary Association at Hampshire Record Office, ref. SM62 14, and the *Reading Mercury* 1859-64. As they are easily distinguishable, I have not given separate references for each extract.

Money and spellings are as given in the original documents.

[The perils awaiting a lady from Bath who came to lecture at Basingstoke's Mechanics' Institute in 1851 are recounted in our **Past Pieces**.

Editor]

DACRE MEMORIAL LECTURE

Friday 26th March 1999 at Cricklade College, Andover

Dr Kate Clark will talk about recent archaeological work at Wherwell Abbey. You will be shown what has been revealed of the remains of one of Hampshire's most important religious houses. Organised by the Andover History & Archaeology Society, tickets may be obtained from their Secretary: Mr John Barrell, tel. 01264 324926

GEORGE WILLIS - OLD BASINGSTOKE

In 1963, the late George Willis gave a talk to the Basingstoke Natural History Society and, happily, this was recorded. From a transcript of this tape (in true Basingstoke Talking History tradition !) we present the second part of this talk in George's own words. The rest of the talk will appear in subsequent newsletters; we believe you will enjoy this first-hand account of long-gone Basingstoke.



General view of long-gone Basingstoke from the railway bridge

While on the subject of roads, considerable changes have taken place during my time. Dark Lane, for instance, now one of the broadest and most open roadways in the town, was then a narrow tunnel below the ground surface arched over with trees, down which women were reported to be afraid to go after dark, (quite reasonable too), ending in Eastrop Bridge over the canal at its lower end. I have often wondered what amount of traffic could possibly have accounted for so deep a cut as Eastrop Lane which seemed to go from nowhere to nowhere. I think there must have been a trackway to the south, across the London Road over what became Crossborough Hill but on the south it ran down to the river valley and there does not seem to be any main road on the north side of the valley to account for the amount of traffic that must have cut into the grounds in Dark Lane.

Fairfields, of course, brings memories of the old sheep fairs that were held on the fair fields which were granted to the town under the enclosure award of the 18th century and I suspect that I may be the last man who ever saw sheep on Fairfields. This was when Southern Road had recently been made - the pavement was below what is now Fairfields School - and had been cut into the sloping ground with a ragged peeled edge unfenced on the left-hand side. Beyond it, I very well remember where Fairfields School now stands a shepherd with a flock of sheep. It is perhaps nothing to be very proud of, to be very glad of, to be the last man to have seen the sheep.

Sarum Hill I remember as built on one side, the right-hand side only, with the old British School at the top of the hill, now the Baptist Church, and below it a very nice row of acacia trees which later development of course has removed, going down to what is quite a new road. I very well remember the construction of Penrith Road for archaeological reasons. They were digging out the sloping ground sloping down to the brook which runs across the bottom of Sarum Hill. They cut down about 5 or 6 feet on the right-hand side and spread the earth over on the other side to make the level roadway and in the middle of the road they cut a very deep trench to lay the sewer. I trespassed with a great deal more reluctance than I have done since but I did find my way across the newly turned soil and was pleased to note among it a great many grey cracked flints which indicate fire. They had been in the fire and had been burnt - they were scattered freely over this soil. Then turning to the right-hand, a steep 5 or 6 feet bank, I was delighted to discover a band six or eight inches deep of absolutely black earth which indicated very extensive fire and also accounted for the burnt flints. Among the burnt flints I also found flint flakes of artificial manufacture going back a very long way. This obviously was an old prehistoric cooking site. The inhabitants of the time had settled down on the gravel banks of the stream, a very good place from the cooking point of view I suppose. But in the hundreds and perhaps thousands of years since, the rain and soil creep had covered up this cooking site to the extent of 5 or 6 ft of undisturbed soil, as the contractor told me. There it had registered as one of the very early occupation sites of Basingstoke.

I can well remember when there were only 2 railway lines between Waterloo and Basingstoke. I remember, during my late schooldays I think it was, the very considerable alterations made when the second pair of lines was run down from Waterloo and to Basingstoke and beyond. In the early days at the top of Station Hill you went into a yard, much smaller than the present one, and then you went up 6 or 7 steps up to an outside platform which was on a level with the station platform itself. You went through the booking offices from the outside platform to the inner one. One day I was going by train and for some reason not apparent to me at the time, the public were politely turned off the platform into the booking office again and were shut off the main platform. I was very puzzled to know in a general way what was the cause of this but I think I saw it afterwards. I looked out of the window and there in a train, sitting in an ordinary compartment, a train on the other line waiting to get onto the Reading line, in the window sat an elderly white-haired lady reading - Queen Victoria.

Basingstoke has had a common for something like 200 to 300 years in its present form. It was formed in the late 1740's. At that time, the old countryside round the town of Basingstoke rather resembled an enormous allotment garden because it was divided vaguely into 6 or 8 large fields each of which was divided up into strips of apparently allotment of an acre or 2 acres each. At one time they had belonged to the inhabitants of Basingstoke individually but curiously enough by this time they were gradually falling into the hands of big landowners - Lord Portsmouth and the colleges and so on owned perhaps half a dozen acres in one field and 20 acres in another field and so on. As a method of agriculture with a growing demand of increasing population, it was a very uneconomic way of farming and so Enclosure Awards were introduced by which commissioners were appointed to review the situation and where one man owned x numbers in half a dozen fields, he was allotted one big field in compensation for that and his separate allotments were dissolved. This of course meant very much more economic farming and while it involved a certain amount of discomfort and privation probably to small people who depended on their allotment for a livelihood - taking their cow from their own paddock in the town to the common fields or to an allotment in the common fields, it was undoubtedly an economic advantage to the country.

Incidentally I don't know whether you will remember an iron railing going from the White Hart up to a Common Gate. That was put there to protect the ordinary inhabitants of the town going up the London Road from the cattle that went from town to Common daily. The common as such was given to the town as compensation for their old right of turning their cattle out freely over the common fields after harvest. There were no hedges separating these fields so that after harvest a whole big field, having been harvested in the same way, could be thrown open to the general cattle of anyone who liked to turn them on. In compensation for that, a specific common was allocated at Nurham Springs as it was called then, certain trustees were appointed to govern it and there is a record that they had to plough the whole place and sow turnips for the first year. Then there were all sorts of contracts made for fencing it and planting trees in it, and so on, which appear in the minute books of the common. Then it was thrown open and so, for the last few hundred years, the trustees have managed this space for the benefit of the community. Of course, there have been such economic changes since then that the cattle are now turned on by local farmers rather than the inhabitants of Basingstoke. There was an allocation of rights to all the residential properties then existing in Basingstoke and these were based, as far as I can recall, on the amount paid in the last assessment to the Poor Rate from which they deduced the annual capital value and then something per pound was allocated to the particular property.

The canal dates I think from the late 1700's and was to connect the Thames with Basingstoke and was ultimately to go on south to Southampton. The Canal Company originally had a very rough time, spent all its money and had to raise some more money in a second Act of Parliament, but had a very good time during the French wars because it was a great deal safer to run goods from the Thames by inland waterway than it was to send them round the coast in boats which French Privateers paid attention to. In my early days, there was water in the canal fairly continuously. I have seen a barge grounded there for quite a long time until the water rose and in those early days my recollections of the canal are extremely pleasant. One of my summer holiday treats was with my sister, curiously enough. My sister and I used to walk down to Hatch Pond and get onto the canal towpath and walk back into Basingstoke. That remains in my mind as an extremely pleasant experience because of the long sunlit days with clear water in the canal and shoals and shoals of fish that I remember. It was a very pleasant experience, one of those that has dwelt in my mind and given me a taste for outdoor life.

..... to be continued

THE 1998 PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION WINNERS

The winners of the 1998 photographic competition, who received their prizes at the Christmas Social, were:-

1 st prize	Chris Burrowes	Prehistoric Boulder Field Walls
2 nd prize	Marten Harris	Roman Grave Stone at Chester
3 rd prize	Chris Horrocks	Round Tower at Farleigh Castle

Congratulations to you all !

CALENDAR

Thurs 18 Feb	Coppicing & Woodland Management in Community Woodlands Debbie Miller	FWM
Thurs 25 Feb	On the Road Archive film of Hampshire transport (1.15pm) also ANNUAL DINNER at BCOT - 6 pm for 6.30	HRO BAHS
Friday 5 March	AGM (Historic Buildings Section) and Manor Houses and Churches of the Isle of Wight David Lloyd, 7 pm, Room 12, King Alfred's College, Winchester	HFC
Wed 10 March	17th Century Wills & Inventories Peggy Drury	FBH
Thurs 11 March	DRINKING DRIVING: WEALTH & POWER IN THE EUROPEAN IRON AGE Sara Champion also Plugging into the Past OGS Crawford Memorial Lecture, Kate Clark, 7.30 pm, Science Lecture Theatre, Peter Symonds' College, Winchester	BAHS HFC
Thurs 18 March	Lillie Langtry, the Jersey Lily Elsie Russell	FWM
Thurs 25 March	...to a green thought Sources for the history of gardens and gardening	HRO
Thurs 8 April	THE THRUXTON ROMAN VILLA & ITS MOSAIC PAVEMENT Graham Soffe	BAHS
Thurs 15 April	Thomas Edmondson and his Train Tickets Michael Farr	FWM
Thurs 29 April	...the Great Men in Hampshire the family and estate records of the Baring family	HRO
Sat 17 April	Spring Symposium: The Hampshire Land- owner 9.30 - 4.50 in the Cinema, Hampshire Record Office, Sussex Street, Winchester	HFC

BAHS = our society; all except the Annual Dinner at Church
Cottage, 7.30 pm

HFC = Hampshire Field Club

HRO = Hampshire Record Office, Last Thursday lectures, 1.15 - 1.45 pm
in the cinema, HRO

FWM = Friends of the Willis Museum, 7.30 pm at Willis Museum

FBH = Friends of Basing House, 7.30 pm at Basing House