



Account of Purley on Thames

Project Purley Meetings 2014

January 2014

17th Jan 2014

St Mary's Burial Ground

Our usual January 'Member's Evening' took place on Friday 17th with a talk by John Chapman and Catherine Sampson on St. Mary's burial ground and its surveys. Despite the inclement weather a large number of members attended the meeting and several guests, three of whom joined on the night.

John began his talk by showing an aerial photograph and plan of the church and burial ground which dated to the mid 1980s and showed the burial ground before it was full. He explained that the first known survey of the memorials was carried out by Elias Ashmole in 1664 and this was followed by a revision to this plan in 1800, a survey by Mrs Becker in 1870 and then finally surveys by Project Purley, first in 1984 and then again in 2013. Project Purley compiled a guide to the memorials in the 1980s, based on all of the surveys to date, and this is now in the process of being revised. John then showed images of a number of different types of the memorials and spoke of others that are known to no longer survive.

Next came an overview of the archaeological dig which took place over two seasons in 1981 and 1982, before the new extension to St Mary's Church was constructed. A number of fascinating photographs followed detailing the many finds made and including some of the late Saxon pillow burials which the amateur archaeologists had unexpectedly uncovered. The discovery of these had resulted in the police being informed and John recounted the incident when a somewhat bemused policeman arrived on site to inspect the find and pronounced that finding an old skeleton in a churchyard was hardly unusual and in this instance not really a police matter. An unusual circular brick feature apparently had everyone guessing as to what 'treasure' it might contain. One could imagine the disappointment when it turned out to be empty and in fact a Victorian drainage sump.

Catherine spoke next about three particular monuments and the stories of the people they commemorate. A finely carved memorial to Anthony Gilbert Storer was the first under the spotlight. This was the Storer who built Purley Park although he lived between Purley and his sugar plantation on Jamaica. He inherited his Jamaican estate and money at a time when it was still run by slave-labour but by his later years everything had changed. Edith Sophia Sherwood, in contrast, was born into a family of yeoman farmers who had been settled in Purley for over a hundred years. She went to China with the China Inland Mission in the late nineteenth century and was tragically killed in July 1900 during the boxer's rebellion against foreigners. Catherine finished with the Canning tomb, a chest tomb now in poor condition, which commemorates Thomas and Mary Eugenie Canning and their son, also Thomas. The use of chest tombs dates back to at least the thirteenth century and their style and decoration has varied over time. By the late Georgian period classical chest tombs, often featuring Greek urns on top, such as the Canning tomb, were popular. Recent research has revealed that Mary Eugenie was the daughter of Michael Blount of Mapledurham House and her first marriage was to Charles Stonor of Stonor Park. Mary Eugenia remarried Thomas Canning, apparently an impoverished Catholic lawyer, a year after being widowed and their son Thomas was

born around three years later. Quite how long or where the Cannings were living in Purley is as yet unknown and further research is needed.

February 2014

February

A Walk along the Thames Path.

Our February meeting began with a further report by Catherine Sampson regarding the local Canning Tomb in St Mary's graveyard, after which she welcomed back our speaker Bill King who had returned to describe the first stage of his Thames walk.

Bill commenced his illustrated walk from the Thames Head near the village of Kemble where a stone plaque under an ash tree marks the traditionally identified source of the river. The area is usually dry in the summer months but a nearby basin of stones marks the Spring.

Moving on past old gravel pits and pretty Ashton Keynes he came to North Meadow, an old flower rich hay meadow outside the ninth century Saxon town of Cricklade. To the East is Ermine Way built by the Romans to form a causeway across the flood plains.

Walking on towards Lechlade, Inglesham Lock, which marks the head of the navigation system, comes into view where the Severn and Thames Canal flows into the River Thames. It was used to facilitate trade between Bristol and London until the construction of the Cheltenham and Great Western Railway in 1836. A number of buildings associated with the canal known as Roundhouses have survived, one still adjacent to the lock. They were built in the 1790s for use by the lock keepers and lengthmen. The River Leach from which the town gets its name and the River Coln join the Thames at Lechlade.

To the East is St John's Bridge reputed to be the first stone bridge over the Thames outside London. Nearby is St John's Lock, overlooked by a statue purporting to be Father Thames and brought here from its original site near the source of the river. Where the road from Swindon enters the town it crosses the River Thames via the old toll bridge, the 18th century Halfpenny Bridge.

Not far from Lechlade the Thames flows past Buscot where you will find the smallest lock. There had once been a brewery and a thriving cheese industry exporting three thousand tons a year to London, but the lovely Adam style mansion house managed by the National Trust is there for all to visit. Nearby is the Tudor gem of Kelmscott Manor, the former summer retreat of William Morris, founder of the Arts and Crafts movement.

Again the Thames passes through gentle countryside to 12th century Radcot Bridge, the oldest bridge on the Thames and the site of a Civil War battle in the 17th century. The nearby Swan Inn was recommended. From here the river is isolated, no roads or habitation but otters and kingfishers can be seen. On reaching another old bridge at Newbridge there is another recommended pub, The Rose Revived. Beyond here the Thames widens until it approaches the outskirts of the City of Oxford.

March 2014

The 32nd Annual General Meeting

The March meeting commenced with the 32nd AGM moving quickly through the election of

officers, the Treasurer's report and members' approval of the proposed increase in fees for 2015.

The Chairman then gave her report of the varied programme of talks, interesting visits, Barbecue and Christmas party and the Rain or Shine performances enabling several charities to benefit from a share of the profits.

She reminded us of our core commitments to research, record and preserve the history of Purley, two important changes being the demolition of the Storer Family's Victorian Boathouse and the Infant School becoming a Primary school.

The aims for the present year include more work on St Mary's burial ground and the Canning Family.

Catherine ended by thanking the Treasurer, Secretary and the rest of the Committee for their hard work.

After a glass of wine, members returned to enjoy a talk by Catherine,

Berkshire and South Oxfordshire Churches

Catherine began with Minister Lovell Church in the Windrush Valley, built by the Lovell Family whose impressive manor house now stands in ruins just behind the church. Next came the 'hidden gems,' many of which stand in open fields away from the nearest settlement. Photographs of Widford revealed the apparent bumps and hollows of the now deserted village which the church once served, whilst those of the delightful St. Thomas at East Shefford revealed the beauty of its largely untouched medieval interior. The original medieval church at Nuneham Courtenay was pulled down together with its surrounding cottages and houses during the construction of Nuneham House with its landscaped parkland. The new Georgian Church was built close to the house and is now in the care of the Church Conservation Trust.

Catherine then recounted some of the richer historical stories associated with our churches. Frilsham Church, with its unusual circular burial ground, stands on the site of an apparent pagan temple and is dedicated to St. Frideswide. The lives and fortunes of the young Ann Seymour, widow of John Dudley and Amy Robsart, wife of his brother Robert Dudley, connected the churches of St. George in Hatford and St Michael in Cumnor and involved royal plotting and intrigue, the tragic Lady Jane Grey, the favours of Queen Elizabeth I and suspected murder. Next we moved to Burford church and the story of the Levellers imprisoned in it and Wargrave Church destroyed by a mysterious fire, blamed on the Suffragettes, in June 1914.

Catherine finished with a collection of churches and features not to be missed which included the Kedermister Library at Langley Marish Church, monuments at Aldworth, Fyfield, Ewelme and Swinbrook, wall paintings at Ashampstead and the wonderful elephants at St. Swithun's in Wickham. In conclusion came the Mitford family memorials at St Mary's in Swinbrook which commemorate four of the famous Mitford sisters, their only brother and their parents amongst other family members.

April 2014

Pop Pirates of the 1960's

At our April meeting, in recognition of the 50th Anniversary of Radio Caroline our very enthusiastic speaker, Tony Hadland, began to relate the history behind this event.

At the beginning of the 1960's something happened that changed the sound of British radio for ever - the growth of pirate radio stations. What started out as a protest for the freedom to play music,

ended up challenging the Government and the BBC's rather conservative radio broadcast output.

There were only three national radio stations in Britain all run by the BBC and in the spirit of public service broadcasting the Government insisted all programmes were respectable, educational and impartial and was not allowed to broadcast commercials for fear that advertisers could try to influence the quality or content of the programmes.

Very little contemporary or popular music was played, partly because those in charge of output were quite disparaging about pop music and partly due to existing agreements with the Musicians Union, limiting the amount of time recorded music could be played. In the evenings pop music lovers would retune to Radio Luxembourg with the voice of Horace Batchelor predicting football results and spelling out K E Y N S H A M Bristol and we were reintroduced to the Ovaltines singing

“No merrier children could be seen

Because we all drink Ovaltine”

At that time a young Irishman Ronan O’Rahilly was managing the pop singer Georgie Fame who had been able to get a few songs into the ‘hit parade’ with only limited air play on the larger channels. Rowan decided to start his own station and realised the best way to get round the restrictive broadcast policies of the UK would be to transmit his programmes offshore.

Inspired by Holland’s Radio Veronica, Rowan bought an old ferry boat, named Frederica which he renamed MV Caroline after President Kennedy’s daughter. After conversion it was anchored off the Felixstowe coastline.

On Easter Sunday 1964 at 12 noon Simon Dee’s opening announcement could be heard “This is Radio Caroline on 199 your all day music station”.

Through the ensuing years the BBC was increasingly hostile to Radio Caroline believing it was part of an attempt to break up its monopoly. Its ‘Dirty Tricks’ campaign was prompted by the reluctance of the politicians to take action against the station for fear of alienating young voters.

However in 1966 the Postmaster General, Anthony Wedgewood Benn introduced a law proclaiming the so called “pirate” stations illegal and then making it a criminal offence to assist such stations.

One of the first problems brought on by these new laws was the daily boat that came out of Harwich with food, mail and other supplies couldn’t legally set sail; but the real cause of their demise was the main source of the station’s income - advertisers, all now illegal.

Public reaction and loyalty to the pirate stations had not been lost on the BBC and on the 30th September 1967 Radio One, its first pop music station was launched and Radio Caroline went off the air the following year with Johnnie Walker on board.

Many of the DJs who had made their names on the pirate stations were hired, including Tony Blackburn, John Peel and Johnnie Walker

May

16th May 2014

Project Purley’s Visit to Waddesdon Manor

Project Purley members were due to enjoy a walkabout in Sutton Courtenay on May 16th but unfortunately we were forced to cancel a few weeks beforehand due to the poor health of our intended guide. Instead we kicked off our summer season of outings and events with a hastily arranged trip to Waddesdon Manor near Aylesbury, one of the former homes of the Rothschild family. Waddesdon was built in the 1870s in the distinctive style of a Loire Valley Chateaux and contains an extensive collection of antiques and family memorabilia.

It was a gloriously sunny day, one of the best of the year to date, and as we pulled up in the car park it was clear that we had chosen a good time to arrive - a thousand-space car park almost to ourselves. A shuttle bus was already waiting for us and in no time we were standing in front of the main drive to the house with its uninterrupted views of the house frontage. First stop was tea, coffee and plentiful supplies of homemade biscuits in the restaurant before free time to explore the gardens and aviary. At noon we reassembled in the restaurant for what turned out to be a delicious lunch of hot salmon quiche with a green leaf salad and minted potatoes followed by panacotta and berry compote and then tea and coffee to finish.

After lunch it was time to enter the house and the system of timed tickets seemed to work well at keeping the crowds down and giving you time to savour the exquisite furnishings and works of art. Successive generations of the Rothschild family have built the collections now on show in Waddesdon and a private family trust continues to add further items, even though the house is now managed by the National Trust. Waddesdon's creator Ferdinand de Rothschild was especially fortunate to be able to buy up the family treasures of families such as the Dukes of Hamilton, Buccleuch, Devonshire and Rutland, and the Earls Spencer and Fitzwilliam who were facing financial hardship in the 1870s and 1880s due to the agricultural depression. Their treasures are amongst those which fill the thirty plus rooms and corridors open to the public, each with their own guide and guide cards although audio and visual handsets were also available to hire for a small fee. The visual feast of antiques on display was almost overwhelming. Here a desk used by Louis XVI in the years before the French Revolution, there a rare Savonnerie carpet dating to 1683; whilst every room seemed to contain paintings by the greats such as Gainsborough, Reynolds, Guardi and Vermeer. Up on the first floor Alice de Rothschild's collection of arms and armour was on display in the bedroom corridor, whilst one room was dedicated to Léon Bakst's paintings telling the story of the Sleeping Beauty, commissioned by James and Dorothy de Rothschild, and another held a vast collection of Sèvres porcelain, much of which were ordered by Marie-Antoinette from Sèvres in 1781.

Buzzing and foot-weary from the house, there was time for a quick or in some cases slow peruse of the shop and a leisurely ice cream in the sun before setting off home. All in all it was an excellent day and many of us plan to return.

June 2014

20th June 2014

Annual Barbecue

The evening of Friday June 20th saw the second of Project Purley's summer events with the annual barbecue, courtesy of our generous hosts Ben and Dorothy Viljoen. Preparations for the evening reached a peak in the afternoon of the 20th as Ben, David, David, Richard, Tony and Catherine gathered at Highveldt to erect the gazebos and build a new barbecue brought especially to boost cooking potential. Elsewhere Lee and Ann were busy preparing and pre-cooking the onions and chicken which would be reheated and browned in the evening whilst the sausages and beef burgers cooked.

By 6pm the tables were up, tablecloths in place and the 'delicate art' of preparing the melon boat starters was underway, skilfully assembled by Dorothy, Marjorie, Angela, Lee, Ann and Catherine. The first of the forty-five members, family and friends arrived at 7pm, all bringing with them beautifully prepared contributions for either the salad or desert tables. At half-past it was time to welcome everyone and serve the starters and as that was cleared away our chefs for the evening - Ben Viljoen and David Green - announced that the meats were ready and people began to make their way to the buffet tables and barbecue for their choice of food. For the next few hours the tables of

food slowly emptied, conversation and wine flowed, groups of people took the opportunity to have a wander round Highveldt's stunning garden and everyone enjoyed the rare occasion of the barbecue falling on a balmy summer evening. All too soon the evening began to draw to a close, our hosts and chefs were thanked and everyone made their way home, some to return the next morning to restore Ben and Dorothy's garden to its normal state. Once again we had enjoyed an evening of wonderful food, laughter and friendship.

6th June 2014

Rain or Shine Performance of The Merchant of Venice

The Rain or Shine Theatre Company made their annual visit to The Barn on Friday, June 6th, for an evening performance of *The Merchant of Venice*. There was to be no matinee this year as Kendrick School, the regular afternoon audience had booked their own private performance to enhance the girls' studies for their exam curriculum.

The eight-strong cast arrived at 4pm on the Friday afternoon, by which time Ben, Richard and I had set up the chairs and tables, and Angela, Ann, Jean and Lee had organised refreshments in the small hall. The actors assembled their stage, lights, costume rail, props and music, ate the snacks we had provided for them, did their vocal warm-up, then there was time for everyone to have an hour's rest before the audience began to arrive.

The only actor making his debut with Rain or Shine this year is Michael Skellern taking the role of Bassanio, but the performance in Purley was the opening night of a three-month long run for all the performers. The play is one of the most controversial as well as one of the most acted of all Shakespeare's works. It contains strong elements of anti-Semitism, and because all the characters are prone to prejudice as well as nuances of genuine altruism, the entire cast have the opportunity to project considerable depth of feeling. (They might possibly have performed a different play - *Treasure Island* - in the afternoon, but that's another story, in more ways than one).

Not specified as a comedy, *The Merchant of Venice* has comic elements, especially in the way director James Reynard, who also plays Shylock, has interpreted the script and even introduced glimpses of slapstick, for example with the selection of the caskets and the quest for the missing ring.

In true Rain or Shine style the actors are able to hold the attention of the audience as they switch from the ridiculous to the sublime, most markedly in the scene where the disguised Portia (Claire Tucker) delivers the powerful "quality of mercy" oration and brings about the final humiliation of Shylock, who is denied his pound of flesh. An interesting confrontation here, as the two actors are married in real life!

The general opinion after the play was that although the hilarity of previous productions was not evident, the quality of acting was as good as we have come to expect from this talented company and the issues raised in the story give much opportunity for subsequent reflection. Perhaps most important of all is the fact that the event, including Project Purley's share of ticket sales, Catherine's refreshments, plus a very generous leaving collection, meant that a net profit of £570 could be donated to the Alexander Devine Children's Hospice.

I express my sincere thanks to everyone who helped to make the evening such a success.

14th June 2014

Exhibition - Purley in The Park

Bucknell's Meadow was the venue for an extremely well-attended 'Purley in the Park' family day on Saturday June 14th, which was organised by the Purley Primary Project to raise funds for the

proposed building works to Purley's new primary school. Saturday's events began with a football match in the morning before a range of stands, food and beverage stalls, games and activities, together with a large display arena were steadily erected in the run-up to the 2pm grand opening by M.P. Alok Sharma.

Project Purley supported the event with a small display of exhibition stands featuring Purley Infant School and the River Estate. These proved very popular as did the tithe map which we displayed on a table in front of our gazebo and a selection of folders containing back copies of the Purley Parish News and photographs and memorabilia relating to the Storer family of Purley Park. Several people expressed an interest in joining Project Purley and we sold another two copies of Purley in Old Images. Overall we were blessed with hot and sunny weather, despite the drops of rain as we began to erect our gazebo; however our corner position together with the exposed nature of Bucknell's proved hazardous for the gazebo and its contents when the wind unexpectedly rose strongly on occasions.

Before the event had even opened we nearly lost the gazebo as the wind got underneath it and pulled it off its pegs, and we were forced to borrow bricks and string to hold the display stands in place. It was not until we came to take the gazebo down however that we discovered that the plastic mountings of the frame had become so mangled that it is now unusable. Ours was not alone in suffering such a fate; at least two others close by were similarly rendered unusable. Despite these setbacks the day itself was well-organised, extremely enjoyable and brought all sections of the community together. My thanks go to: Ann Betts, Marjorie Butler, Roger Butler, Angela Edwards, Jean Debney, Lee Hall and Richard McDonald for their help on the day.

July 2014

28th July 2014

Visit to Houses of Parliament

Monday 28 July dawned bright and sunny but it was quite cool when 44 members of Project Purley, some with family and friends, gathered by the Old Barn at 8.15 am to catch the coach to London. Our destination was the House of Commons. After driving through torrential rain and several traffic jams we arrived in dense traffic with police everywhere. Before entering The Palace of Westminster we were subjected to intense security checks before we congregated in our two groups inside Westminster Hall.

After passing through important rooms with glorious pictures and statues, etc. we first visited the House of Lords where the Queen announces her Prime Minister's proposals to Parliament. The seats are red leather seats but the Queen walks on a blue carpet up a wide staircase to the Robing Room before being seated on an ornate golden throne surrounded by a golden arch. Interestingly, Prince Phillip's throne is ½ inch lower than the Queen's. Next stop was the House of Commons where we were again not allowed to sit on its green seats. There was a forest of hanging microphones and numerous speakers on the crowded seats so all could be seen and heard on our TV.

Our guide, Nathan, had a good sense of humour and told us so many things. A statue of Charles I prompted our guide to say 'that he was too tall and it was decided to make him shorter' - here Nathan put one hand on top of his head and the other under his chin and explained that this was what he told visiting school children! A bust of Mrs Thatcher made of bronze prompted the comment that it should have been iron.

The tour ended back in Westminster Hall and we returned to the coach to eat our packed lunches en route to Kew Gardens. After reviving cups of tea, etc. we split up in different directions to look at things, enjoying what was by now a hot and sunny afternoon. One couple decided they wanted to

view the 'Climbers and Creepers' but were very surprised to find it was a children's playground! Several folk (including myself) visited Kew Palace which was beautifully furnished in the time of George III, its most famous resident. A number of young ladies in period dresses and bonnets answered questions and were very helpful. On my way to the Palace I found a couple of huge trees wearing colourful "Tree Cosies" round their trunks. They had been knitted - and crocheted - by 50 women for those with special mental health problems and were very colourful.

After a final cup of tea we returned to the coach and were back at the Barn by 7 o'clock, tired and happy. Our thanks are due to our MP, Alok Sharma, who set up the visit, to Val Jones who organised everything, plus our driver, Wendy, who was very cheerful and helpful.

August 2014

September 2014

Purley from the Air

A large number of members, visitors and guests crowded into the old Barn for the first meeting of our autumn and winter programme.

The evening began with a presentation by David Downs of a cheque for £500 to Marion Jacobs of Crossroads Care (Reading), a charity who rely entirely on donations. The donation was raised from the profits made by the Rain or Shine Theatre Company's performance in June of Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice.

Jean Debney gave a brief report of the archaeological finds made, with Catherine Sampson, of pieces of brick, tile, and pottery in the grounds of the warden's bungalow behind St Mary's Church, where it is believed that the old Manor of Purley Magna stood.

This was followed by a fascinating illustrated talk by John Chapman from his collection of aerial photographs of Purley between 1947 and 2013. They showed in great detail how and when the village developed in the post-war years. Several images showed the extent of flooding, particularly in 1947 when it was difficult to see where the river ended and the landscape and houses began.

The early images were taken by the RAF, then by private companies and individuals. In 1984 John took the opportunity, while attending a fete at Denefield School in Long Lane, to take his camera with him on a helicopter ride over the village. The pictures were in colour and included many close-ups of roads and roof-tops.

John explained with great clarity the main features of all the images making it a thoroughly enjoyable evening.

October 2014

17th October 2014

Literary and Artistic Footprints of the Thames

An almost record audience crowded into the Barn on Friday 17 October to hear Nick Brazil from Whitchurch talk about 'Literary and Artistic Footprints of the Thames'. Each literary and artistic figure was illustrated with coloured slides, information about their achievements plus other details.

The talk began with the Catholic house of Mapledurham just across the river where Alexander Pope (1688-1744), the poet and satirist, was a regular visitor. As Catholics his family had to live ten miles outside London and they settled in Pope's Manor, Binfield, where as a child he suffered from tuberculosis of his bones which left him a crippled hunchback. He created a theatre with a statue of Pan and wrote many poems and plays. By the early 1700s he had formed a close, but platonic relationship with the unmarried daughters of the Blount family, Teresa (1688-1762) and Martha (1690-1762) his favourite. After his death he left everything to Martha. Mapledurham was also where scenes from the film *The Eagle has Landed* were shot after WW2.

Nick then moved on to talk about Cecil Aldin (1870-1935) who, influenced by the artist, Randolph Caldecott, became famous as a sporting artist and for his pictures of dogs. A copy of his picture of the horses in the Purley Remount Depot during World War One hangs in The Barn, the same barn which featured in the drawing. Sadly, his son, Dudley was killed in the First World War (his memorial plaque is in St Mary's church). Cecil Aldin Drive is named after him.

Across the river from Purley, Hardwick House was the home of Caroline Lybbe Powys who between 1756 and 1808 maintained a diary recording the daily social round of her class with gossip details. Eliza, the wife of a descendant, Sir Charles Rose, was a sculptress, whilst Henry James Rose (1843-1918) wrote *Portrait of a Lady*.

Kenneth Graham (1859-1932) the well-known author spent the last years of his life in Pangbourne. The legend continues that, while living there, he wrote *Toad of Toad Hall*, published in 1908 and illustrated by Ernest Shepherd, basing Toad Hall on Hardwick House. However, others believe it was written in Sonning as a story for his only son. Unfortunately his son, who had had an unhappy childhood trying to meet his father's expectations, committed suicide while at University.

Nick finished with a section of other key artists and writers of the area. Eric Kennington (1886-1960) of the King Charles Public House was a war artist in both world wars, and made the war memorial in Kensington and one for Checkendon. May Wedderburn Cannan (1893-1973) was a prominent war poet whose fiancée Bevil Quiller-Couch survived the war only to die in the Spanish flue pandemic in 1919. Finally D H Lawrence author of many well-known books lived, with his wife Frieda, for a short while in Myrtle Cottage, Pangbourne, during World War One.

All in all this was a fascinating talk which was much appreciated by the audience.

November 2014

November 2014

The Mary Rose

Another record audience of members and friends crowded into the Old Barn in expectation of an interesting and exciting talk: no-one was disappointed.

Our speaker, Trevor Sapey, arrived with several large boxes and bags containing a tableful of reproduction artefacts found in the Mary Rose plus a suit of sixteenth-century sailor's clothes which he wore to give his illustrated talk. He explained that the long white shirt was tucked round his legs to complete his underwear, his black jacket had separate sleeves tied on with tapes and his knee-length trousers attached in the same way. Slits had been cut in the outer garments so the shirt could be pulled through for decoration. He had a white cap (the surgeon had a black one) under a black woollen round hat. The whole lot looked grubby - washing was not a priority in those days!

Trevor began by outlining the history of the Mary Rose which was ordered by Henry VIII in 1509 as his flag ship, to increase his navy to fight the French. Made of wood from the New Forest and

Thames Valley, she measured 45 metres bow to stern (about 4 buses), 30m across and weighed 700 tons. In 1536 she was refitted and given extra guns. Nine years later, in 1545, she was lined up with the rest of the Navy in Portsmouth to defend England from the French navy.

Historians have used a large painting of the English and French fleets in battle that day together with documents to reconstruct what happened. The picture shows the masts of the Mary Rose just above the water as she steadily sank after 34 years' service. Various theories exist as to what caused her to sink and most centre on the heavy guns and the foreign crew who wouldn't have understood the English command to close the port holes. Tragically the netting in place above the deck to thwart boarders prevented many sailors from escaping when the boat started to capsize, and most drowned.

The ship was left to rot where she sank, but was rediscovered by divers in 1965 and in 1979 research began under the control of Margaret Rule. 600 divers, and 1000 dives later, some 19,000 artefacts, large and small, had been recovered. These included the doctor's and carpenter's chests, skeletons of men, shoes, musical instruments, large numbers of nit combs, a back gammon board and a young dog. The hull was finally raised in July 1982. For two years it was sprayed with water to remove the salt, and then with wax and it is currently being dried with giant fan heaters. It is now housed in a new purpose-built museum which opened to the public last year.

A large number of items were then passed round to examine and guess their use. Needless to say we were all fascinated but very puzzled about most of them until Trevor explained their purpose and how they fitted into a ship's life in the Tudor period. One that caught my eye was a 'match stick' made of a length of carved wood with a notch in one end to hold a piece of knotted rope. This was held by the 'Gun Master' behind the guns and then, when the cannon had been loaded with gunpowder and shot, he ignited the gunpowder to fire it.

The whole evening was absolutely fascinating and the speaker was in no hurry to get back to Portsmouth as he dealt with many questions and comments. Project Purley is planning a trip to Portsmouth Harbour in July 2015.

December 2014

Christmas Party

Not only did we have unusually warm weather for our Christmas party (snow and ice are more typical) but we also had a new venue, The Barn, as a consequence of increasing membership numbers making The Gatehouse sadly impractical this year. Thirty-eight members gathered at 7.30pm to enjoy a relaxed evening with a sumptuous 'bring and share' buffet and the normal fiendishly difficult Christmas quiz devised by David Downs. We were relieved to find only one football question this year but completely stumped by another question which no one managed to get right despite several very creative attempts to solve. Overall Jacky Brown was the worthy winner achieving a very credible 17 out of 20 and being awarded a bottle of wine as her reward.

The Barn was suitably decorated with a tree, lots of fairy lights and beautifully decorated tables and thanks go to Angela and David Edwards, Marjorie Butler, John Chapman, David Downs and Ann Betts who helped to get everything ready for the evening and to Roger Butler who along with Marjorie prepared and served mulled wine