

The History Of Cinema In Andover: Phil Ray, February 2017

At the February meeting of the Historical Society Phil Ray, Chairman of the Andover Film Club, gave an account of The History of Cinema in Andover; he described the personalities involved and some of the films that featured over the past century. Early cinemas had a great impact on the social life of towns; at the beginning of WW2 Andover was able to support three cinemas, showing a wide choice of films on a weekly basis.

The first cinema in the town was the 350-seat Electric Picture Hall, which opened on 25th May 1911 showing black & white silent films accompanied by a pianist. It was located in what was then part of West Street and would have been opposite the Library in the present Chantry Centre. The site was in the grounds of Chantry House, previously the home and surgery of Dr Ernest Farr, who was later one of the founders of the War Memorial Hospital.

During the 1890s and 1900s most film exhibition took place in temporary venues; the projection technology using limelight and highly inflammable nitrocellulose film resulted in a number of fatal fires. The 1909 Cinematograph Act specified a strict building code which required the projector to be enclosed within a fire resistant structure; commercial cinemas like the Electric Picture Hall had to be inspected and licensed. The cinema was re-named The New Theatre in 1924 when it was altered to accommodate live acts. Enlarged to 450 seats and re-named again as the Rex in 1940, it eventually closed in 1959; the building was demolished in 1969 to make way for the Chantry Centre.

The second cinema in Andover, The Palace (268 seats), opened in December 1926 in Junction Road; it showed the first "talkie" in September 1929. The Palace was taken over by Odeon in 1935 and again by Classic in 1967 when it was re-named Vogue cinema. It closed in 1968 and was converted to the Vogue Bingo & Social Club with no cinema. However in 1971 space was provided for the Tatler Film Club, a private members club (over 18s only) showing uncensored films on four days a week; for the remaining three days this space again became a Classic public cinema "showing family type entertainment". However the post-war decline in audiences led to the inevitable and the Classic finally closed in September 1973; the building is now the Mecca Bingo.

The third cinema in the town was the Savoy, which opened in London Street in April 1938 with accommodation for 1,004 patrons; opulent and spacious, it quickly established itself as the premier entertainment venue in Andover. In 1940 the Savoy car park was used to exhibit a downed Messerschmitt 109 to help raise £5,000; this financed a Spitfire which was named The Andoverian. In 1953 the Savoy was one of the first cinemas to install 3-D projectors, used in conjunction with 3-D glasses. In an attempt to increase audiences it was refurbished and converted to a two screen cinema in 1972, but times were changing and the Savoy was forced to close in 1986. Under new ownership, a single screen cinema was opened in 1987 with "a top class nightclub and disco" sharing the building; the cinema closed in 2001. A nightclub called Club at Life opened in 2004; in 2015 it was refurbished and was relaunched as Cameo & Vinyl in 2015.

In 2008 a "Reel" 4-screen multiplex cinema opened as part of the ASDA development on Anton Mill Road, so after seven years cinemagoers once again had the opportunity to see films on the big screen in Andover. The Reel was purchased by Odeon in November 2011.

Alfred the Great – Man & Myth: Professor Barbara Yorke, March 2017

At the March meeting Professor Barbara Yorke, Professor Emeritus of Early Medieval History at the University of Winchester, gave a talk entitled “Alfred the Great – Man & Myth”. It was a great privilege for the Historical Society to have secured a speaker with such depth of knowledge and enormous enthusiasm for the period in general and King Alfred in particular, as the rapt attention during the talk and number of questions at the end bore ample witness.

Alfred was born in Wantage in 849 and died in Winchester in 899; he ruled as King of Wessex from 871-899. His legacy included the jury system, militia and a naval force. With the help of scholars from other areas of England, Wales and Francia, Alfred studied works regarded at the time as providing models of ideal Christian kingship and ‘most necessary for all men to know’ (and even translated some texts from Latin into Old English himself). Alfred tried to put these principles into practice in the production of his law-code. He became convinced that those in authority in church or state could not act justly or effectively without the ‘wisdom’ acquired through study. He set up schools to ensure that future generations of priests and administrators would be better trained, as well as encouraging the nobles at his court to follow his own example in reading and study.

Among the scholars he recruited was Asser, a monk from Dyfed who became his friend and eventually Bishop of Sherborne. Asser presented Alfred as the embodiment of the ideal, but practical, Christian ruler; a brave, resourceful, pious man, who was generous to the church and anxious to rule his people justly. Clearly Asser accentuated the positive, and ignored those elements of ruthless, dictatorial behaviour which any king needed to survive in the 9th century. Alfred and Asser did such a good job that when later generations looked back at his reign they saw only a ruler apparently more perfect than any before or after. Asser’s biography of Alfred described him in glowing terms – he “united the virtues of ruler and private man; no other man had so many virtues disfigured by so little alloy”. He also compared Arthur to Solomon “having come to despise all renown and wealth in this world, sought wisdom from God and thereby achieved both wisdom and renown in this world”. However Asser’s biography was not widely circulated; the main source of information about Alfred was the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle which was created in the late 9th century, probably in Wessex, with copies distributed to monasteries.

In 849 there were four kingdoms; after Northumbria, East Anglia and, Mercia had fallen to the Vikings, Wessex under Alfred was the only surviving Anglo-Saxon province. Alfred won a decisive victory at the Battle of Edington (on Sedgemoor) in 879. Further Viking threats were kept at bay by a reorganisation of military service and particularly through the ringing of Wessex by a regular system of garrisoned fortresses. Alfred promoted himself as defender of Christian Anglo-Saxons against the pagan Viking threat and began the liberation of neighbouring areas from Viking control. He thus paved the way for the future unity of England, which was brought to fruition under his son and grandsons who conquered the remaining areas held by the Vikings in the east and north, so that by the mid-tenth century the England we are familiar with was ruled as one country for the first time.

When Alfred died in 899 he was buried in Winchester; later he was re-buried at nearby Hyde Abbey; the location of his remains are now unknown. In 2014 a fragment of pelvis from a 1999 excavation of the Hyde site was radiocarbon-dated to the correct period; it is possible this may belong to Alfred or his son Edward, but this is unproven.

King Alfred may be the best known of our Anglo-Saxon kings, but by the end of the evening Professor Yorke left her audience in no doubt that that not all of the recorded history is entirely accurate – a mixture of contemporary spin and later embroidering of history. The story of the burning of the cakes may or may not be based on fact – and even if the latter, then it was probably bread not cakes!

Practical Archaeology – New Ways of Uncovering Ancient Stories: Andy Manning, April 2017

The subject for the April meeting was “Practical Archaeology – New Ways of Uncovering Ancient Stories”. The speaker, Andy Manning, is Senior Fieldwork Manager for Wessex Archaeology, one of the biggest archaeological organisations in Britain. He explained how new equipment has revolutionised our ability to uncover the secrets of the past. A selection of artefacts on display ranged from bronze ago scrapers and a Roman tile with hobnail impressions clearly visible, to gun flints, pistol balls, a 1750 clay pipe and a Victorian ink bottle.

Archaeology can be traced back to the time of Ramesses II, whose son dug the sites of old temples. In Britain, for over 150 years archaeology was mainly carried out by volunteers, local societies and Universities. In the 1970s county archaeologists were appointed with central funding. In the 1980s developers were required to fund archaeological work on their sites and 95% of projects are now commercially funded during development. This has led to a huge expansion of archaeology – in 1990 there were 5-600 projects a year; there are now 4,000 pa, with 8,000 archaeologists employed.

Alongside this upsurge in activity has been a huge change in the technology available to survey potential sites. Aerial photography has been used since WW1 – shadows cast by a low sun reveal irregularities on the surface of the ground which are simply not visible from the ground. LIDAR is a new development using laser beams and analysing the reflected light; this can pick up level changes of a few centimetres, and will penetrate woodland to reveal contours of the underlying ground. Under the sea, sonar surveys were able to reveal the outline of a WW2 Dornier 17 bomber lying upside down on the Goodwin Sands.

Geophysical techniques include the magnetic gradiometer, ground penetrating radar (GPR) and electrical resistance tomography. GPR enables scanning of deeply buried or inaccessible sites, will go through concrete and allow examination of what lies beneath historic floors which cannot be disturbed. Radiocarbon dating enabled the Amesbury Archer and his companion to be dated to 2400 – 2200 BC. Analysis of isotopes in teeth can reveal where a person was born and brought up – the Amesbury Archer was a very early metalworker and came from the Alps; his skill in working copper would attract him to this area, where Stonehenge was a centre of power and he could expect to find employment.

The Battle of Fromelles on 19-20 July 1916 resulted in 5,533 losses, mainly Australians. With the help of descendants, recent DNA analysis enabled positive identification of 124 from 250 bodies of Australian soldiers found buried in a mass grave.

However, alongside these technological developments, traditional methods of examining sites continue to be of value, from field walking to trenching and test pitting.

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Food From The Past: Jenny Stevens, May 2017

At the May meeting, "Food from the Past", Jenny Stevens discussed some of the methods that can be used to piece together clues about the diet of our ancestors.

By training an archaeologist, Jenny Stevens is now Area Community Organiser for Hampshire Cultural Trust, looking after museums in Andover, Aldershot and Basingstoke. She has a particular interest in life during pre-history – what was it like for people, what did they eat and how did they live. In Palaeolithic times (3-4m years ago) hominids out of Africa were hunter-gatherers, nomadic and following the herds which provided a source of food. The Mesolithic was a transitional period; these 'modern' humans left seashells in their middens (rubbish tips); their tools are small, produced by chipping and are hunter-gatherer tools. There was a move to agriculture when the sea level changed and the availability of seafood was less; Neolithic tools are often polished and are more varied; these are the tools of more settled societies with some agriculture – domesticated animals and wheat. At Danebury Hillfort, occupied from about mid-6th century BC to 100 BC, traces of four- and six-post buildings off the ground were granaries; grain was also stored in deep sealed pits. The Roman diet included fish and shellfood; oyster shells from Roman times have been found 100 miles from the sea. The sheep would have been similar to the Soay breed, shedding their fleece in the spring, but as sheep were domesticated and bred they required shearing. Butchery marks on bones found in archaeological digs reveal what animals were kept for – milk or meat. The Romans developed specialised pottery which reveal clues to diet. The Roman invasion may have been in part seeking grain supply to feed the expanding army; they developed drying to enable grain to be stored for longer. Plenty of Roman amphora have been found but there is no evidence that olives were grown in England. The climate in England became warmer from the late Iron Age; the Romans carried out terracing for drainage and were able to cultivate vines.

Cave paintings from the Palaeolithic showed what people were hunting and therefore what they were eating. Egyptian and Roman mosaics provide similar clues. The Lutterell Psalter was a good illustration of everyday life in the Middle Ages (Jenny Stevens noted that all the chefs were men). However these illustrations inevitably show how the rich live. Examination of coprolite (fossilised faeces) gives a broader view of the typical diet of the time. Isotope testing now reveals what people were eating based on trace elements, also where they lived and were born. Scientific techniques are developing very rapidly and the limiting factor to more investigation (as described at the April meeting by Andy Manning of Wessex Archaeology), is the high cost of the expertise now required..

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Operation and History of Twyford Waterworks: Dr Martin Gregory, June 2017

At the June meeting Dr Martin Gregory described the Operation and History of Twyford Waterworks, the Edwardian pumping station just outside Winchester. Twyford Waterworks has a unique array of buildings and machinery, with steam, diesel and electric pumps telling the story of water extraction, softening and supply since the beginning of the 20th century; a piece of industrial, social and economic history.

Dr Gregory is a retired schoolmaster who taught physics at Winchester College for 37 years. He has worked on and researched the history of engineering and technology for over fifty years, his particular interests include the stationary steam engine for pumping and power generation, and the development of the sewing machine. Until last year he was a trustee of the Twyford Waterworks Trust.

Dr Gregory explained that in the mid-19th century diseases were not associated with water-borne infection and life expectation was low. Following the "Great Stink" and outbreak of cholera in London, in the 1860s Sanitation Acts required local authorities to provide clean water and deal with sewerage. Not all councils were willing to spend money on water and in some areas private companies were set up. The South Hants Waterworks Co Ltd was formed in 1876 with waterworks at Timsbury supplying Romsey and the Test Valley. Wells were drilled down into the chalk and water pumped up a hill to a reservoir, from which gravity fed the water supply. Water penetration through chalk is about one metre a year, but is instantaneous where there are fissures in the chalk. Wells were sunk 50m deep into the solid chalk and then side tunnels (adits) were dug to find fissures.

Twyford Waterworks was set up in the 1890s and designed by Baldwin Latham, chief engineer to South Hants Waterworks Co; completed over a period of thirty years, he designed impressive buildings which are typical of the era. Southampton was one of the first local authorities to provide water as a public service; in 1884 Southampton Corporation Waterworks was set up in Otterbourne. However by 1900 areas that had become part of expanding Southampton were still served by South Hants Waterworks, and were charged much higher water rates; as a result, in 1921 the South Hants Waterworks Co was compulsorily purchased. Twyford became part of Southern Water Authority in 1974. Southern Water now owns the site and 5m gallons of water a day are still extracted from the original boreholes. Twyford, Timsbury and Otterbourne were unique in supplying softened water; Timsbury and Otterbourne waterworks have disappeared but the wells are still there, now served by electric pumps.

In 1974 Twyford became a Scheduled Historic Building with Historic England highest rating, being of national and international importance and the only waterworks left with all the original equipment on site. Pre-privatisation there was an obligation on water companies to maintain water supply, so everything was duplicated. Twyford has a 1914 Hathorne Davey pumps which is as efficient as a modern electric motor, but to run it the hand-fired Babcock & Wilcox boilers required twenty people.

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Crime & Punishment in the 19th Century: Colin Moretti, September 2017

“Crime & Punishment in the 19th Century” was the title of a talk by Colin Moretti at the September meeting. The speaker, a retired physicist, has a special interest in family and local history research and is a member of the Romsey Local History Society. He described the 19th century as a century of reform, during which a national prison service was set up, conditions became less harsh and an improved diet was provided. There was a large reduction in the number of capital offences, transportation was ended, as were public executions.

At the beginning of the century prisoners had to pay for their keep. At the end of their sentence they also had to pay the gaoler for their release; inevitably some were unable to pay and so continued to be incarcerated after serving their term.

Punishment for crimes included humiliation, mutilation, stocks, pillory, public whipping and branding; capital punishment was handed down for 220 offences, including burglary and robbery. Capital sentences could be commuted to transportation to the colonies. Prisons had no sanitation, no windows and no ventilation, with consequent threat to health. Diet depended on fees paid to the gaoler; payments also had to be made to other prisoners. Some towns had small secure buildings for short term detention – some of which still exist.

Ten thousand people a year were held in debtors’ prisons; they paid for their keep and were allowed out for the day, but were detained until their debt was paid off.

Early in the 18th century there had been a surge in crime arising from unemployment following the end of the Napoleonic Wars combined with an increase in rural poverty; as a result, by 1819 there had been a fourfold increase in the number of convicts. Some were held in temporary camps or prison hulks (decommissioned naval vessels) and prisons like Dartmoor, built in 1805 for prisoners of war. By the late 1830s more than 270 new prisons had been built.

Robert Peel (Home Secretary 1822-27) introduced the 1823 Gaol Act, which included abolition of capital punishment for 100 offences and introduced remission for good behaviour. Inspection of prisons started in 1835; 1845 saw improved diets; the 1869 Debtors Act saw imprisonment for debt largely abolished. In 1877 prisons, previously run by counties, were taken over by the government.

Up to 1610 transportation had largely been to Virginia but this was halted in 1776 by the War of Independence. From 1787 convicts were sent to New South Wales and then in 1803 to Van Dieman’s Land (Tasmania). Transportation was abolished in 1857.

In Public Works Prisons convicts had to work for the government. In Chatham it was work in the dockyard; in Dartmoor mailbags; in Dover the harbour. At Portland a 3 mile long breakwater took 25 years to construct, 2,000 prisoners quarrying 6m tons of stone using just hammer & chisel. Prisoners carrying out such physical tasks were allowed a more generous diet. Colin Moretti concluded his talk by revealing a very personal connection with the Portland breakwater; his great-grandfather, a postman, had been sentenced to six years hard labour at Portland for stealing two sovereigns and a dozen stamps.

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King John – Was He So Bad? : Erica Tinsley, October 2017

The subject at the October meeting was “King John – was he so bad?”. Making a welcome return to Hurstbourne Tarrant, the speaker was Erica Tinsley, well-known local historian and Chair of Andover History & Archaeology Society.

King John (1166-1216) was born in Winchester. There are other local connections – Andover received four Royal Charters between 1201 and 1213; Ludgershall and Marlborough Castles belonged to John; and in 1215 he set out to Runnymede from Odiham Castle.

During the 800th anniversary of the signing of the Magna Carta a commentator described him as a “lecherous traitor, depraved tyrant and a hopeless leader in war”. This stimulated Erica Tinsley to read as many comments and criticisms as possible to see if a balanced view could be formed: was he really so bad? As background to the formative influences to the character of King John, she explained his lineage and upbringing. Son of Henry II & Eleanor of Aquitaine, John was the youngest of eight children. His parents separated when he was one year old; Eleanor went to live in Poitiers and John was sent to Fontevraud Abbey in Anjou until he was six. When John was 15 Henry brought him over to England. Henry had decided how to divide his land between his sons but John was to receive nothing, hence his nickname of “Lackland”.

Following the death of Henry’s sons Henry and Geoffrey, Richard I inherited the whole Angevin Empire; however he wanted to go on Crusade. Before leaving he nominated Geoffrey’s four year old son Arthur to be his heir, appointing William de Longchamp, Bishop of Ely, to govern England in his absence. Longchamp’s authority was openly challenged by John, who eventually succeeded in driving him from power and from England. Soon after Longchamp’s departure from England, Richard was captured on his journey back to England from the crusade and held for ransom by Henry VI, Holy Roman Emperor.

Richard returned to England in 1194; he forgave John for opposing Longchamp’s authority and soon set off to regain his French lands, now supported by John. John “set aside” his first wife and married Isabella of Angoulême. Phillip of France recognized John as ruler of Brittany & Anjou but peace only lasted two years after which Phillip took John’s lands by force. John captured Arthur, who subsequently “disappeared”. By 1204 the whole of Normandy except the Channel Islands was lost to England.

John was innovative in the way he raised taxes, charging more fines and taxes on the aristocracy. When these were not paid retribution was harsh and there was increasing resentment among the Barons. Pope Innocent III placed the kingdom of England under an interdict in 1208, after King John refused to accept the Pope’s appointee Stephen Langton as Archbishop of Canterbury. With his barons increasingly discontented, in 1214 John decided that reconciliation with the Pope would be wise; he promised to repeal unjust laws. However he was still obsessed with recovering Normandy & Anjou, but an unsuccessful campaign resulted in defeat for John at the Battle of Bouvines.

He returned to England, humiliated and impoverished. Less than a year later – his barons increasingly belligerent and the French now revealing their own designs on the English crown – he was forced to sign the Magna Carta, which limited his power and formed the basis of English democracy.

However John reneged on the Magna Carta; the rebel barons invited Prince Louis of France to support them. Strife continued from August 1216 until John died at Newark in October that year; he was buried in Worcester Cathedral. The barons preferred John’s son to French rule and the nine year became Henry III, with William Marshall as regent. Within a year the barons switched sides and agreed to support Henry against Louis.

During John’s reign England lost all her continental possessions, and at his death he nearly lost England to the French. He was one of the most controversial monarchs, with commentators still expressing differing views. The Chronicles soon after John’s death were the most critical; in 1259 one opined “Foul as it is, Hell is made fouler by the presence of John”.

Twentieth century translation of documents during John's reign have provided a wealth of information about John's reign and detailed insight into his management of affairs. Ten years after John's death, Roger of Wendover described his "incorrigible idleness"; however mapping his journeys amply demonstrates this to be untrue because he was constantly travelling throughout his kingdom.

In 1961 W L Warren published "King John", stating that he had "the mental abilities of a great king, the administrative ability of a great ruler but he never got a chance to prove his skills". "Rivals and traitors tried to cheat him out of his inheritance". In 2015 David Starkey's view was that as a war leader "All too often John backed down, backed off or actually ran away". When faced with a pitched battle John did not have the resolve of his brother Richard I.

The Angevin Barons in France had become tired of English rule; King Phillip offered a more liberal rule and a brilliant Court. Phillip's support tipped the balance to cause Arthur to rebel and Phillip supported the rebel Barons in England. So John's inheritance of the crown might be seen as something of a poisoned chalice.

John was always pushing the boundaries of how he could raise more money for wars. Richard had spent a huge amount on the Third Crusade and the ransom demanded for his release was the equivalent of £2bn today. The coffers he inherited were empty and John raised taxes for a purpose, not for personal gain. It was a time of rapid inflation; the money collected for a war chest was money that went out of circulation, so damaging the economy.

The Chronicles agree that John did not make friends, he did not consult his Barons and did not display leadership skills. The 13th century Barnwell Chronicles record that "He was indeed a great prince but less than successful.....he met with both kinds of luck".

In 1994 Ralph V Turner asserted that "John had potential for great success....however too many personality flaws held him back". He lacked likeable qualities; he had deep distrust which made him distrusted. In John's world, affairs of state depended on personal relationships; this he ignored – or perhaps did not care?

John often suffers comparison with his brother Richard I. John clearly had poor interpersonal skills, whereas Richard was "a thug" but good with people. However it should be remembered that Richard only spent six months of his reign in England and the Treasury coffers he left to his brother were empty.

King John broke the conventions of the day – in the way he treated the nobility; being implicated in the murder of Arthur; and treatment of French prisoners. He was a king who failed in what he set out to do; how far could he have been the master of his own destiny? An enduring benefit was that after his reign English kings concentrated on England.

Old Andover: Derek Grimston, November 2017

The subject of the Historical Society meeting in November was "Old Andover". When Derek Grimston, the speaker, retired from the RAF he joined Test Valley BC as Community Liaison Officer. Twenty years ago he became a Green Badge Guide for Andover; in response to requests from people who were not able to join a walking tour he developed a slide-show version of the tour. It was a PowerPoint version of this virtual tour of Andover that was enjoyed by a large audience on 13 November. Some highlights from the numerous images will give a flavour of this fascinating talk.

The first mention of Andover is in 950AD when King Edred is recorded as having built a royal hunting lodge there. At the time of the Domesday Book in 1086 Andover had 107 male inhabitants and probably a total population of about 500; quite a large settlement by the standards of the time. Three hundred years ago Andover was the second largest town in Hampshire. The population in 1887 was 5,000; by 1960 it had grown to 20,000 and is now 50,000.

By way of introduction a historical tapestry was shown; it was woven by two dozen ladies in the 1980s and hangs in the Conference Suite of the Test Valley Borough Council offices (can be viewed by prior appointment). On one of the nineteen panels Andover is depicted, showing the old Norman arch which was the west doorway into the original 1150 church. It was moved when the old church was demolished to make way for the present larger building but still serves as an entrance to the churchyard. The new parish church was the gift of Dr William Goddard, a former headmaster at Winchester College. Sadly Dr Goddard died before the new church was completed in 1845; his fine house was left to the PCC as a vicarage. The Caen stone used in construction of the church came up from Southampton to Andover by canal. The cenotaph in the churchyard originally stood in the High Street; it is unusual among cenotaphs, bearing the dates 1914 - 1920 because it includes those who fell in the North Russian Expedition against the Bolsheviks.

There are many interesting buildings in the area near the church including timber framed buildings in Newbury Road (now a hairdresser) and Ford Cottage, which was saved from demolition and moved to the present site in Marlborough Road. The oldest house in Andover is in Chantry Street; originally a 15th century hall house, chimneys were added in the 1700s and it later acquired four front doors (although now occupied as two houses). Some of the shop premises in the town are worthy of closer scrutiny, the upper parts revealing fine architecture and their origins as private houses.

Andover was located on important turnpike routes and boasted as many as sixteen coaching inns during the heyday of the stagecoach services, which flourished for a century until the advent of the railways in the 1850s. The Angel Inn dating from 1175 is the oldest in the town (rebuilt after destruction in the great fire of 1435) and was in a prime position on a corner where the original main road turned from Newbury Street down the High Street. The White Hart was a coaching inn for private coaches (with stabling for 75 horses). Images of many of the other inns were shown; some still bear the original name but others have changed (it was usual for a landlord to take the name of his inn with him if he moved to new premises, just as retailers do now).

There were numerous watermills, the earliest being the 1760 Town Mills. The workhouse was near Town Mills; the original hospital was in Junction Road. Station Hotel in Bridge Street is a reminder of the branch line to Redbridge (Southampton) which opened in 1865 and finally closed in 1967. The 1838 gasworks were on the Asda site with coal originally brought in by canal; natural gas came to Andover in 1970. In 1928 a power station provided the first electricity supply but in 1931 the town was connected to the national grid. There is a replica Viking ship in Bridge Street; although Viking ships never came to Andover they did penetrate as far as Longstock.

Members Talks: December 2017

At the December meeting three members of the Society gave illustrated talks on widely different subjects.

The first talk was **“Ancient Yew Trees”** by founder and former Chairman **Mike Nash**. Describing Hampshire as “Yew tree rich”, he reminded us that all parts of yews are poisonous (including the seeds but not the berries). The oldest recorded Yew is in Perthshire and in 1769 it had a 52ft circumference, which indicates an age of 2-3,000 years although very probably more. The problem with dating yews is that they rot outwards from the centre but can continue to flourish despite the hollow core by putting down new shoots from the base of the trunk, and with low branches touching the ground and taking root. In churchyards yews are frequently pollarded and cut back, which makes dating even more problematic. The hollow yew in St Mary Bourne churchyard is 22ft in circumference indicating an age of some 1,600 years. The hollow centre of the yew at Woodcote church is large enough to walk through. Churchyard yews are usually to the SW of the church; however many are older than the building, showing that the church must have been built to the NE of the tree, evidently on what had originally been chosen as a pagan site.

“Making Sense of the Census” was the title of the talk by **Bryn Evans**, Secretary of the Society. The best known example of an early census was organised by the Romans, familiar from the story of a journey to Bethlehem. They kept good records but all were lost during repeated sackings of Rome. The first census in England was the Domesday Book in 1085, a very thorough record of who owned what – a land and resources survey enabling tax to be levied. The 850 monasteries dissolved by Henry VIII held records but these were destroyed. In 1801, at the time of the Napoleonic Wars, Prime Minister Pitt needed an estimate of population to establish how many able bodied men there were in the country to serve in the army and also, following disastrous harvests in 1795 and 1797, to assess how much grain needed to be imported. Censuses were carried out every ten years thereafter, this being formalised by the 1840 Population Act under which administration was by District Registrars (previously done by the Lord-Lieutenants). On Sunday 6th June 1841, 35,000 enumerators issued forms, each covering up to 200 households; these were collected on the Monday; after information had been extracted the household forms were destroyed. The amount of information collected has grown steadily over the years, the 2011 census running to twelve pages – and who knows how many it will be in 2021!

Finally in **“Tilting at Windmills”**, subtitled **“A Historical Yarn from Stoke”**, Chairman **Andy Watson** described a research project he had carried out. This originated from a query regarding a right of way, but the project developed into research to establish the location of a former windmill in Stoke. Examination of a number of old maps was carried out; an 1826 map by Greenwood showed a sketch of a post-mill, and a windmill was recorded on an 1846 tithe map; the 1894 Ordnance Survey map also marked a windmill in Stoke. Windmill Hill was located, as was Windmill Lane. Andy also discovered there is a Hampshire Mills Group; their records revealed that from 1791-1809 the miller in Stoke post-mill was a Charles Holdaway, who also owned two farms locally.

Mulled wine and mince pies added to the enjoyment of a most entertaining and instructive evening. At the end of the meeting there was a general feeling that with such interesting speakers within our membership, it was hardly necessary to invite speakers from elsewhere!