

ELSENHAM VILLAGE HISTORY SOCIETY
MINUTES OF MEETING 11th SEPTEMBER 2019
MEMORIAL HALL ELSENHAM

Those Present:

Ray Franklin Chairman	Heather Salvidge	David Verlander
Roger Kendrick	Mike Rea	Chris Bush
Vivienne Hart	Margaret Rea	Diane Bush
Nina Gaubert	Tim Snow	Vic Dowsett
Kevin Wood	Brian Tulley	Nigel Lusby
Carol Wylde	Jill French	Helen Mudge
Frances Lambert	Jill Hunt	Christine Hall
Roger Clark	Phyllis Clark	Tricia Holyomes
Jean Beeston	Ian Beeston	Peter Clear
Therese Clear	John Quinton	Anne Player
Alis Ory (<i>sic</i>)	Valerie Austin	

Apologies:

Tony Bailey	Jackie Bailey	Sue Beeston
Paul Salvidge	Colin Smith	Jean Platt
Ian Jackson	Moyra Jackson	Campbell Dunn
Lynda Dunn		

We welcome John Quinton as a new member.

1. The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed those present and Mr Bill Hardy, our guest speaker for the evening.

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting 12th June 2019

The minutes were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Guest Speaker Mr Bill Hardy

The Chairman introduced Bill Hardy who was returning to us to speak about the building of Kings College Chapel, Cambridge and the use of Arabic Carpenters Assembly marks. Bill started by explaining that his interest in Carpenters' marks started during the restoration of the St Barnabas Barn in Thorley. Since then he has visited very many old buildings to document the marks found within and has now developed a database of over seventy examples.

Secretary's Note: more information on the restoration of the St Barnabas Barn is available from the minutes of our meeting held on 9th March 2016 and available on the website.

The talk started by explaining what Carpenters' marks were and how they were used to identify particular joints in timber framed buildings. The vast majority of these marks were Roman numerals that had been cut into the timber using saws or chisels or a Race knife. These latter items came in several forms and a typical example was passed around the audience. The main assembly marks would often be accompanied by supplementary marks to denote left and right or upper and lower.

Having understood the use of Roman marks Bill became aware of the use of Arabic marks in the building of Kings College Chapel. Some research showed that these marks were very rare and mainly associated with ecclesiastical buildings from the 13th and 14th century. A slide of these marks showed that though they had changed over time, they bore some resemblance to modern figures. It was also clear that the carpenters who used these marks were highly educated.

Started in 1446 when Henry VI laid the foundation stone, construction of the Chapel carried on through the reigns of Edward IV, Richard III and Henry VII - who made the necessary money available to complete the Chapel. It was finished under the reign of Henry VIII in 1515 who was responsible for the magnificent fan vaulted ceiling.

After much effort, Bill was finally granted access to the building in January 2017 in the company of a College guide and an archaeological surveyor from University College London. After climbing interminable stairs he found himself in the roof space occupied by the massive roof trusses and standing on the fan vault ceiling. There are twelve bays making up the building divided by the main roof trusses with intermediate trusses between, these intermediate trusses being some twelve inches (300mm) square.

Interestingly, examination of one of the intermediate trusses showed roman markings on the bottom of the truss and Arabic marks above. The Arabic marks left by the Kings carpenter were some five inches (125mm) tall and carved into the finest quality oak that had come from forests around Thaxted, Stansted and Bardfield.

From records held by the Chapel, the Master Carpenters responsible for the work have been identified. They were Thomas Surgeon who was also responsible for Westminster Hall, John Sturgeon and Richard Russell who was involved in the building of Westminster Abbey.

Thus far, Bill has identified just 26 buildings in 15 English Counties that employ Arabic marks. Marks found in Durham Cathedral are very similar to those found in Kings and as the period is very similar it might be postulated that the same carpenter was employed in building both buildings. Unfortunately it cannot be confirmed for certain as Durham Cathedral have no records of those employed on the construction of it's cathedral.

In any event, a follow up visit to Kings is planned to make a more leisurely survey to fill the many gaps in knowledge left after this first foray. In the meantime, the latest research project is St Michaels Church in Irstead near Norwich where Arabic marks have been found on the South door.

The talk was followed by a question and answer session before the Chairman thanked Bill for his talk.

It was indeed a good talk particularly as Bill confided after the meeting that this was the first time he had given it.

5. Open Forum and Any Other Business

5.1 St Mary's Christmas Tree Festival

It is getting towards that time of year and at the last Committee meeting the theme for this year's tree was discussed and a theme agreed. Jean Beeston has once again agreed to coordinate the decoration of the tree and we look forward to another excellent display. Thank you Jean.

Secretary's Note: I have just been advised that the festival has been cancelled this year as the bridge works on Hall Road are not due to finish until the end of November.

5.2 WW1 Presentation at St Mary's Henham on 2nd November

A study day has been arranged at St Mary's, Henham to talk about the causes and aftermath of World War One. The event will take place on Saturday 2nd November between 10.30 am and 3.30pm at St Mary's Church, Henham. David Morson and Nina Gaubert will be presenting and including research they were unable to share at a similar event last year. Its purpose is to inform people of life during WW1 and to remember the Henham residents who served in that war.

Funds raised will go towards restoring the boards in the Church which list their names and to fit them to the walls of the Church. This would be a fitting tribute to Ray Gaubert who did so much to record Henham's history.

The programme will commence at 10.30 when David will present "Dark Continent". This will cover the rise of dictatorships and authoritarian regimes and the demise of democracies from 1919 - 1939. This will be followed by a lunch break between 12.30 - 1.30pm after which there will be a more light hearted presentation on the research that Ray and Nina Gaubert did about how the Authorities proposed to evacuate Henham residents in the event of East Anglia being invaded in 1914. In typical Ray style, these unrealistic plans are parodied in true "Dad's Army" fashion. There is a suggested donation of £5 and you are encouraged to come along to all or part of the Day to support this lovely tribute and cause.

Thanks go to the editors of The Henham Dragon for the information on this event.

5.3 Help Wanted

We have been approached by Alastair Knott who is writing a book about the Wendens Ambo Flour Mill. He would like to get in touch with Sarah Andrews who lived near Elsenham Station in the early 1970s. Does anybody know Sarah or where she might be found?

There was no one present who knew or knew of Sarah so the next step will be to consult the electoral registers from that time.

It was noted that this query was probably referring to Hollands Flour Mill.

6. Thank You

Our thanks go to Ian and Jean Beeston for preparing the teas and coffees this evening.

7. Date of Next Meeting

Our next meeting is on Wednesday 13th November when Dr Mark Carroll will speak about "DNA, Surnames and Genealogy" using the identification of the remains of King Richard III as an example.

ENDS

Minutes Agreed: November 2019
Ray Franklin - Chairman