



Newport Pagnell Historical Society

Registered Charity No. 801897
Chandos Hall, Silver Street, MK19 0EN
www.mkheritage.org.uk/nphs

NEWSLETTER COVID EDITION AUGUST 2020

Hello, it has been a long time. We hope you have remained safe and well during these unprecedented times. We have all had to sacrifice seeing our family and friends. At last the measures seem to be easing. Hopefully soon we will be able to conduct our meetings free from restrictions.

As you know we carried out a survey regards starting up some sort of adapted programme. The results and analysis have been written up and the report from Chris Nelson follows later.

AGM REPORT

We managed to squeeze the AGM in just before lockdown. As usual it was a short affair. Most of the committee were re-elected with the exception of Brian Breacher who resigned from the committee and from his post as Honourable Secretary, a position he has occupied for some years. His solid, dependable yet jovial presence will be missed by the committee. As you know he was the leading force which gained us the founding from the Co-op local charity scheme.

We did however gain two new members. The above mentioned Chris Nelson and Pat Hurst.

Bill Watson put forward an amendment to the yearly Subscription fee. He suggested that we have a flat rate for every member, regardless of age. This motion was seconded and agreed by all the members present. As from next year the fee will be £10

COMMITTEE OFFICERS

PRESIDENT	RICHARD PARKER	CHAIRMAN	PETER SEAR
VICE PRESIDENT	DON HURST	HON. SEC	CHRIS NELSON
TREASURER	BARBARA EVELYN	MEMBERS SEC.	BILL WATSON
ARCHIVIST	DON HURST/PAT HURST	MINUTES SEC.	SUE DONALD

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

STUART ARMSTRONG, KATH DENITH, ALLEN MULLETT, STEPHANIE PROCTOR, YVONNE SURRIDGE, CAROL WALKER

As usual, please let Sue or Carol have any future donations to the raffle and any articles for the Newsletter to me, Stephanie.

Here are the last two reviews of the meetings before lockdown

Bawdy Georgians – Tuesday 4th February The bawdy but gorgeous Georgians by Tom Jones.

A full audience gathered to hear a suitably attired Tom Jones enlighten us about the Georgian period and to put this period in its place in history.

The period itself was one of almost constant wars but was also an Age of Enlightenment. It was a period of industrial revolution, impressive architecture and wonderful literature some of which is still popular today.

However, it was also an age that divided rich from poor and women from men. For the Georgian men it was a time of property owning, not just land or houses but of women too. A woman belonged to a man and as such was subservient and beholden to him. It was a time when a married man could have affairs and even keep a mistress. However, his wife was stuck with him as divorce was largely frowned upon and might only be achieved by an Act of Parliament which was a very costly action to take.

A woman almost ceased to exist once she married. In fact, a woman's anatomy was even thought to be that of a man's inside out! As the men frolicked with their courtesans, strumpets or jezebels they contracted diseases such as gonorrhoea and syphilis which they often passed on to their wives or unborn children.

A very interesting talk. Thank you Tom. **SD**

The Letters of Walter Croft WW1 – Tuesday 18th February This was a true story about a collection of letters (70 letters with 20,000 words) written by a soldier named Walter Croft, during the First World War. The letters had been stored at the Fusilier Museum in the Tower of London.

Walter had lived in Derby with his family, in a semi-detached home. His father was a railways clerk. He was a counties level hockey player and had been privately, though modestly, educated.

Walter started his service as a signaller and trained in a Military Camp at Epsom. He was very proud of what he and his signaller colleagues contributed to the War effort. He said he found the work very interesting. Early on, he was identified as potential officer material but chose to stay with his colleagues within the ranks. Later, he managed to attain the non-commissioned rank of full corporal.

His letters began in a surprisingly relaxed tone but as the war progressed, they became sad and distressing.

He wrote profusely and clearly enjoyed doing so. In this way he maintained contact with his family and seemed to want them to believe that he was relatively happy. At the beginning of his military experience, his letters were surprisingly up-beat. He had a very warm relationship with his family, back home. Partly in consequence of his prolific letter writing, he managed to receive a variety of comfort food delivered to him from home. He also had a decent relationship with his soldier colleagues, for he shared much of what he received from home, with them. He was an extraordinary, though ordinary sort of man.

As the war raged on, he wrote about the characteristics of so many trenches, how shallow some were that left the soldiers exposed and how deep and soggy others happened to be, making it difficult for foot soldiers to make any real progress. There were shells, then there was gas! As well as rain and cold. He spoke about the varying experiences and changing perspectives. He was a very good writer and keen to share his experiences with his family, little knowing how their tone would eventually have to change.

His experiences were varied but all of the conditions were challenging – and military food was monotonous. Some of the time, there were eleven men to a tent. When they were close to the German firing line, German machine-gun rounds, either hit, or were frighteningly close to their target including himself. The snow was 4 – 6 inches deep. There were many long marches from about 5 to 16 miles with an 80lb pack. Some men seemed to lie down and give in, though he was generally impressed with the men's endurance. He thought the war would last forever! He realised that in such an environment, you really needed to have your wits about you.

The tone of his letters home, began to change, from being pally, friendly and positive! Having earlier felt that he was part of a great experience! He later began to talk about the Battalion being in one room, where they did everything. He was impressed by the way so many soldiers were able to create a variety of home-made musical instruments to entertain themselves. At Christmas time, though, the soldiers were well provided for. But he couldn't stop himself from reflecting on what it would be like at home.

For a brief period from 1st Feb 1916, he was with a reserve group of 45 soldiers, in accommodation 25 x 30 feet, plus equipment. Light was provided by 30 candles stuck on the end of bayonets. But there were ample mugs of tea and tins of salmon.

He suffered from shrapnel in his buttocks and thigh. He wrote in extreme detail and often hilariously. Whilst recuperating in Edinburgh, it was like being part of a victory parade, he said, as they marched down Princess Street, with many people cheering them! He was impressed with the camaraderie and appreciation of the public.

He was much less impressed by the number of soldiers killed in battle and the increasingly terrible conditions of war. In one fearful battle, a third of a battalion of Fusiliers were wiped out. He was hit by a piece of shell. He took the view that the world would have changed for ever. His mental well-being became affected.

He was a very popular soldier with his colleagues.

On 19th November 1916, corporal Walter Croft died in C Ward of No 1 Canadian Hospital, six days after he assured his family, "Not to worry."

Army form B 'Notice of Death to Family' was delivered to his home. That's all the communication his family had from the military.

However, a female Army Chaplain, whose brother had been killed about the same time and in similar circumstances, sent Walter's family a more humane and sorrowful hand-written letter. They must have been very relieved to receive that!

Her letter was quite long and caring. It was also personal and sensitive.

Walter was buried in France. His gravestone lies alongside thousands of others!!! **BB.**

We will keep us informed when it is safe and viable to re-start our meetings.

A big thanks to all members who responded to our June survey

Results of Part 1 (the selective bit)

	Indoor events (e.g. at URC)	Outdoor events (not walks)	Walks
Probably/definitely would <u>not</u> attend	25.3%	15.9%	21%
Neutral	13.3%	9.8%	4.9%
Probably/definitely would attend	61.4%	74.4%	72.8%

In total, there were 84 responses, which is about 60% of the registered members as per our March AGM.

This is an excellent survey response rate, so thank you!

Early responses were more negative towards any form of Historical Society event. But after the UK government began talking about easing lock-down, latter responses were understandably much more positive.

There is obviously a clear interest in outdoor events and walks (both of which would have to occur during the day), which the Historical Society will take onboard. This will, of course, depend on government advice and the situation nearer the time.

We are surprised by the relatively high percentage of interest for indoor events. Any indoor events would, of course, be subject to safe social distancing and pre- and post-event cleaning. However, many venues are still closed, and social distancing means that many of our usual venues are too small to run an event economically.

Results of part 2 (the comments)

There is a lot of concern over the Historical Society being able to guarantee member safety for indoor events (e.g. our usual evening talks at URC), such as enforcing strict attendee number caps, ensuring social distancing, the use of masks (dependent on government advice), and pre-/post-event cleaning.

Many members were quite positive about our evening talks beginning in September, when social distancing is expected to be down to one metre. We hope so too but will need to decide nearer the time.

There were a few comments about streaming or recording our talks online for members – we are discussing this with our presenters. However, this requires them to have specialist equipment and the technical nous, so we cannot expect all of our usual presenters to be able to do so. But this may be an opportunity to enjoy presentations from further afield. We are investigating!

Why we did not ask about Chandos Hall

Even before the official government guidance documents on heritage events and locations were released, it was quite clear that our museum is too small to admit visitors safely and legally. The requirements of the Health and Safety Risk Assessment documentation published in early July made it very clear that any events the Historical Society runs will need to be outdoors or in a much, much larger venue (at the time of writing, museums still essentially require two metres of social distancing). As such, it is a great shame that Chandos Hall will remain closed for the time being. However, the silver lining is that the 'downtime' is allowing Don and Pat Hurst to complete vital artefact cataloguing and other archiving work!

CHRIS NELSON
