

# Hanney History Group Summer Walks 2021

The History Group were able to begin summer outings again this year, and all three visits proved very successful and were richly contrasting too. They were all well attended despite pandemic precautions and, somewhat unusually, were also all blessed by kind weather.

## June 29<sup>th</sup> The Oxford Mediaeval Jewish Quarter



The history group had enjoyed Victoria Bentata's Zoom talk on the discoveries of Oxford's medical alumni and we decided her to engage her again for this walk around the old Oxford Jewish quarter. The tour started on Carfax and ended outside the Sheldonian, having taken in St Aldates, Christchurch Meadows, Rose Lane, and Radcliffe Square. Our leader was well prepared and technically well equipped with a portable speaker which almost drowned out the traffic noise! We progressed from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century and were left in no doubt of the significance of the Jewish contribution, financial and intellectual, to Oxford's past and present. In many cases we visited sites rather than the actual remains but Victoria's descriptive powers illuminated them all. En route we heard of the Jewish contributions to the university in the 20<sup>th</sup> century too. It was judged a successful evening in an Oxford midsummer which provided a fortuitous weather window in a changeable week.

## July 21<sup>st</sup> Radcot House

We visited the home of Robin and Jeanne Stainer at the third attempt, having been thwarted by Covid twice before. We were entertained by a short history of the house and bridge by Robin, stressing the dependence of both on passing sheep and above all stone, from Taynton and Filkins quarries, the former of which made major contributions to both the mediaeval and Baroque St Pauls Cathedrals in London. The demise of the earlier house on the site to the Parliamentary mortars was described, apparently ended by the destruction of the ale stocks causing a surrender.

An exploration of the gardens followed, with their Arabic and English influences having been explained earlier. We were then treated to our hosts' choice of wine, which was delicious and necessary on what was one of the hotter evenings of the year. This capped a perfect evening in the setting of a small Baroque country house.



West front – Radcot House

## August 28<sup>th</sup> Letcombe Brook



The Hanney's major brook, shown above at the Iron Bridge, is a rare chalk stream which has formed the focus of much of the village's history and development. It also offers a rich ecology which has been protected and nourished by both the Letcombe Brook warden, and the Hanney Flood Group, led respectively by Mark Bradfield and Clive Manvell. It had been decided to ask both to explain their involvement in the brook's development, aided by the historical knowledge of our main guide for the afternoon, Paul Sayers. The result was a 2 ½ hour walk along about a mile and a half of the brook in the centre of East Hanney. We heard of otters and voles, flood prevention activities, the by-pass channel to offer upstream access to more species and the lumps and bumps that mark where the abandoned settlements were in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and earlier. The history of both of the Georgian Mills was reviewed and we heard too of the Norman Giffard's Mill, and the evidence in the Hanney boundary map of its site on the way to Grove. A further highlight was when Mark went ahead of the group for no more than 15 minutes to fill several large specimen trays with inhabitants of the brook including leeches, sticklebacks, bullheads, many different insects and numerous other fauna and some flora too. The impromptu catch was diverse and considerable, and entertained the group for some time!

The consensus of all who came was that the walk was an excellent summary of the brook's rich past and present improvements, enlightening us all on many previously unknown aspects. A collection was held which resulted in a generous donation to both the Brook Project and HHG. Due to this success and the restricted numbers, we plan to repeat the walk in 2022.



Clive explaining flood prevention plans to the group



Mark describing plans for further improving the Brook