

## THE WYCHWOODS LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

This season's meetings continue to be well attended, due in no small part to the high quality of the speakers. The first of this year's speakers was our own Chairman, Jack Howard-Drake, who spoke on 'Local Life in the Sixteenth Century'. For many long hours Jack has been transcribing the records of the Oxford Church Courts in the 16th century. This has been no easy task as much of the writing was barely legible, sometimes in English and sometimes in Latin. By dint of his research, Jack was able to give a fascinating glimpse into some of the disputes which beset our ancestors of 400 years ago, and how they tried to resolve their problems.

To achieve justice, all parties concerned had to make their way to Oxford, not an easy matter, with roads non-existent and wheeled traffic almost unknown. There the case came before the Court of the Oxford Diocese which dealt mainly with matters affecting the clergy, but also had jurisdiction over the general public concerning tithes, wills, marriage contracts as well as punishing immorality and scandalous behaviour.

If you were unfortunate enough to miss the talk, you can read of the Court's hearings by buying a copy of 'Oxford Church Courts Depositions 1542 - 1550' published by Oxfordshire County Council and available from County Archives at £3.95 plus 50p post and packing.

Our next speaker, Ralph Mann, was making a return visit, this time to speak about Bliss Woollen Mill at Chipping Norton. He traced its history from its humble beginnings as a cottage industry in the late 18th century, to being the town's largest employer some one hundred years later. This rise was very much connected with the Bliss family, especially William Bliss II, who had seen the work force rise from seventeen in 1839 to some seven hundred by 1870. This period saw, not only the growth of the mill buildings, but also the building of the railway and cottages and houses for workers and staff. William Bliss II was also responsible for the provision of chapel, school and cemetery, as well as providing social functions for the work force.

However, the end of the 19th century brought problems. Fire destroyed the Lower Mill, which was replaced by the present structure. Financial problems followed, and the Bliss family left the firm which continued to operate under differing owners until its final closure in 1980. It is now awaiting development.

The last meetings of the current season are:-

April 14th at Shipton	Memories of Shipton Station	Ian Matthews
May 12th at Milton	Out of the Attic	Members

At this last meeting of the season it is hoped that members will bring along artefacts and/or memorabilia (especially those with a local flavour) which can be shown at the meeting, together with some pertinent commentary. It is NOT intended that this will be a display of works of art or antiques, but rather the more ordinary articles from the past.