

The Wychwoods Local History Society

At the March meeting Martin Way spoke on 'Roses and Castles' which referred to the decoration of canal boats and their artefacts which he had first encountered while teaching at Cropredy near the Oxford Union canal. Martin then told us of the early history of water transport on the canalised rivers and fens when the barges relied on sails, 'flash' floods from the first locks and then human power to pull the barges back upstream. Then came the construction of canals with level stretches of water controlled by locks which first began near Manchester to shift heavy loads of coal at a far cheaper rate than by road. Others realised the potential and canals became widespread over England as coal mine and factory owners sought cheap transport for their heavy goods produced by the Industrial revolution.

Some of the workers displaced by the earlier Agrarian revolution, but familiar with the use of horses, probably sought work on the new canals. Here, they set up their own way of life, almost entirely on the water in the barges which they decorated in their own style often featuring roses and castles.

The format for the April meeting was different from the usual as it was the 21st birthday of the society. This meeting began with one of the founder members, Margaret Ware, giving a brief history of the first ten years of its life. During that time the society was not content just to listen speakers at the monthly meetings but also did something positive like the recording of some of the local history by way of hedge and church surveys, field walking and the investigations into 'humps and bumps' on various sites. The society also gathered local documentary evidence from newspapers, censuses, church and school archives as well as photographs. This work continues.

From all the material gathered it has been possible to research further and then publish some of the findings in the society's journal 'Wychwoods History', the latest, number 17 appeared on the night. There was then a short interval for refreshments, answering a quiz, and a chance to see some of the work produced by the society over the past 21 years.

The evening ended with a short entertainment, on a historical theme, by four of our members, with songs by Margaret Ware and Duncan Waugh and monologues by Wendy and Jim Pearse.

It was pleasant to see another of our founder members, Mike Linfield back with us for the evening. The society thanks the founder and committee members of 1981 and to all those who have helped the society over the intervening years, with especial thanks to the three chairmen and two secretaries who have coped with the 21 years

The society welcomes old and new members to its monthly meetings at a cost of £5 per annum for an individual and £8 for a couple. This subscription includes a free copy of 'Wychwoods History' as and when published. The new season of monthly meetings begins on 19 September 2002 at Milton village hall when Tim Porter will speak on 'The Cotswolds in the Wars of the Roses'.

Contact may be made via Chairman Sue Jourdan 01993 830179, Secretary Wendy Pearse 831023, or Treasurer David Perceval 831535.