



1966- 2016

Alresford Historical & Literary Society

Newsletter October 2018



Mary Russell Mitford's Forgotten Alresford Writings

With **Brian Tippett** Professor Emeritus of Winchester University



Wed 17th October 2018

7:30 Methodist church Jacklyns Lane, Alresford. Visitors Welcome: £3:00 at the door.

Brian says of this talk:

The reference books tell us that Mary Russell Mitford, author of '*Our Village*', was born in Alresford in 1787 and later lived in Berkshire at Three Mile Cross, which she took as the subject of her book.

In fact '*Our Village*', as we now know it, represents only a small selection from her published writings. In other books, long out of print, she wrote about other places, including Alresford. Unfortunately no one in Alresford seems to have noticed, so we have missed some beautifully detailed childhood anecdotes and full-length character sketches of considerable historical interest. In them she depicts the town, its people and the surrounding countryside at the end of the 18th century. We glimpse the interior and garden of the grand house where she lived and learn about local cricket, the rector, the churchwarden and the landlord of the Swan. Most entertaining of all are her humorous portraits of local 'characters' and eccentrics.

As a preview of a forthcoming publication Brian will open up these long-forgotten writings and retell the fascinating story of Mary's heroic struggle against the financial havoc wrought by her reckless father.

Brian Tippett has given talks to the Society on many occasions over the past twenty years on a variety of literary topics, most recently on Rector John Hoadly, John Keats and Edward Thomas. He holds degrees from Oxford University and was before his retirement, Assistant Principal of what is now the University of Winchester.

Newsletter. Latest copy date for the October issue is October 29th 2018

Please send Copy to Robert Fowler 01962 734125 email to: secretary@alresfordhstandlit.co.uk

Review of September Meeting

Canals and English Narrow Boats with Roger Bricknell

Roger Bricknell entertained members with a rich store of personal memories and photographs from years of countrywide recreational travel in his own narrow boat.

The Duke of Bridgewater's canal completed in 1761 to transport coal was the first of an eventual 2,200-mile nationwide network of canals which transformed the transportation of heavy goods of all kinds. Uneven terrain and the need for huge volumes of water created many technical problems, which the canal builders solved with great ingenuity. Hilly country necessitated cuttings, tunnels, aqueducts or (most laborious of all) staircases sometimes of twenty or more locks.

Among the most spectacular constructions is the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct overlooking Llangollen with its terrifying 100-foot drop. Other impressive engineering achievements include Cheshire's Anderton Boat Lift, the rotating Falkirk Wheel and Foxton Inclined Plane which lift boats bodily as much as 50 feet from one level to another.

As commercial canal traffic declined recreational canalling became popular and abandoned canals were reopened, the large cargo holds and tiny cabins of the old boat people being replaced with modern lounges, bedrooms and bathrooms.

But memories of the past remain — most chilling of all the ghost of Harecastle Tunnel whose screams are often still heard and were once said to presage mine disasters.
BT

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Recommended Reading from your Library

Saboteur : The secret war of Tony Brooks, SOE's youngest agent By Mark Seaman Published 2018.

Summary: The official, never before told, account of Brooks's wartime service as an undercover agent. His is an exciting story; time and again he was faced by danger and incipient disaster. He brushed shoulders with some of the worst traitors of the Second World War, and was targeted by the Gestapo, who came within an ace of entrapping him.

Did you Know ? ALRESFORD AND CRICKET

The October talk by Brian Tippet is a reminder of the role that cricket played in Alresford Society in the 19th Century

Mary Russell Mitford wrote: "Alresford is or will be celebrated in history for two things: the first ... for my birth; the second for cricket".

When she wrote that, however, the days when Alresford was a centre for cricket were already past. Between 1770 and 1795, In the latter half of the 18th century there were four cricket grounds in and around Alresford. (chief was Stoke Down (now part of Itchen Down Farm), Tichborne Down (sharing the terrain with the old racecourse), the Nythe, forming part of the drained land between the Pond and the Bighton Road, and Fob Down (now part of Fobdown Farm). There was also a private ground at Northington Grange, but the present Old Alresford ground at Upton Farm is substantially later than the others and rarely used. Cricket continued at Alresford, as at Hambleton, but it no longer stood at the high peak of its world.

It was the passing of the age when in 1835 the 'old' Cricketers Inn was advertised for sale. It was the building which still stands at the corner of Sun Lane (then called Bramdean Wey and Tichborne Down). The advertisement in the Hampshire Chronicle read 'Lot be sold: The Cricketers Inn, New Alresford. *This spot is well known as the most favourite place of amusement in that part of the County, and has been in the hands of a Mr William Freeman and his family for upwards of seventy years.*'

Recently obtained Perins school magazines published in 1904/5 showed that Cricket was played weekly on Fobdown and Tichborne Down. Detailed score cards were printed and heroic performances lauded.

Original Research by John Adams, lately of the AH & L Society. Updated with additional information. See also our Web site for Alresford Displayed Number 3 article 9. Alresford's Famous Cricketers by John Arlott