



Alresford Historical & Literary Society

NEWSLETTER
1st November 2021



THE SOCIETY'S PLANS & NEWS **ALL MEETINGS TO BE LIVE AGAIN!**

The time has come for our society to face the reality of living with Covid; but we can outwit the evil critter by being cautious! Our first real post-Covid meeting on 17th November will be in a new venue, the very spacious, airy and beautiful nave of St John's Church where social distancing will be easy. Initially we will skip tea and biscuits but the John Pearson Hall will be there for the future. What could possibly go wrong? Nothing we can think of, so next year we have booked to continue to meet in St John's in January, February and March, and then we'll review the situation. Volunteers please! We ask any of our members who are familiar with the operation of the church buildings to volunteer to help with stewarding etc. Please let us know if you can help:

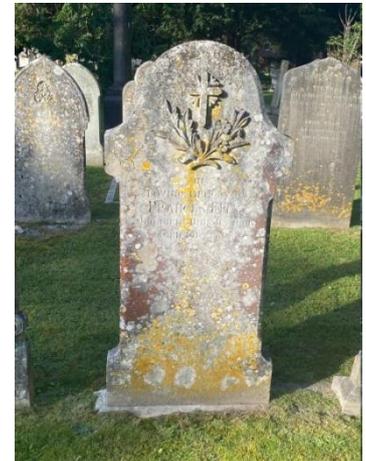
secretary@alresfordhistandlit.co.uk

Concerning the mechanics of the meeting in more detail, please arrive at the church at 7.15 - 7.25 and sign in. Stewards will then guide you to seats leaving maximum gaps between groups. It would be appreciated if you would wear a face covering in consideration for our vulnerable members.

17th November 7.30 pm – live in St John's, Peter Pooley
presents *Unremarked Ancient Curiosities in Alresford*

Our esteemed President Peter Pooley, who I hasten to add is not ancient but is definitely curious (meaning inquisitive!), has had some lateral thoughts and set his Pepys aside for a while. He thought that while the mainstream historical aspects of Alresford have been superbly explored by our society and others, there are some hidden curiosities to be uncovered. He has disinterred some for our edification.

Peter has told us that his talk, lavishly illustrated with photos taken by Janet, will draw your attention to some visible pieces of our history which few may have noticed, and explain their relevance to the life our predecessors lived. Some are inconspicuous, like a piece of graffiti from 1703, or the grave (pictured here) of the old lady who lived to 101 spanning three centuries. Others are very obvious, like the steep slope of the pavement at the top of West Street, or the blocked South door of the Church, but require some explanation, which he will provide. Why is there a veranda (the only one in the Town) outside the dry cleaners, how is it that we have so many very steeply-pitched roofs, why was our oldest house built on a slope? Peter will explain these and several other aspects of our rich heritage, hoping that by studying them we will understand better where we came from, and therefore who we are.



Be prepared for a special talk that couldn't be more apt to our local Hist & Lit remit!

GLIMPSES OF ALRESFORD'S PAST (7) – by Brian Tippett FRENCH PRISONERS AND REFUGEES

In 1906 Edwin Drew wrote about the French in Alresford. As a boy he had puzzled over the French inscriptions on the gravestones in the churchyard and he recalled what his grandmother told him about the friendly reception of the French officers who came to Alresford as prisoners on parole in the early years of the 19th century (she was living in the town at the time). He added another memory of his own from 1870 when he was in his teens:



One day I was much struck, for the Winchester train had just come in and in the back-field near the station were several French ladies waiting — one an elderly one with white hair — and all at once through the stile passed a well-dressed rather delicate, handsome young man who threw his cap in the air, [and] flew into the open arms of the white-haired lady. ... I thought the hugging would never cease and when he could leave his mother — for such she was — scenes of emotion took place between him and the other ladies. It was a French soldier son, away from the battlefield meeting mother and kindred on a foreign soil, as their native land had driven them forth.

The background to this is that in 1870 French people came to Alresford as refugees during the Franco-Prussian war, having presumably been displaced by the Prussian invasion or (if indeed their native land had driven them forth) to escape the turmoil of the Paris Commune. It seems that over fifty years after Alresford served as a parole town, the French still remembered it as a place where they would be kindly received.

A full account of Alresford's many years as a parole town for French prisoners of war is given in the forthcoming new history of Alresford which is due for publication early next year, with a launch planned in March. [BT]

(ADDENDUM – ENTENTE CORDIALE?)



I couldn't resist filling a space with a couple of pictures. They are of course totally unrelated to Brian's "Glimpse"[MD]



A BOOK RECOMMENDATION – from John Miller

The former British Ambassador to the USA during President Trump's term of office, Sir Kim Darroch, has just published his memoir of that difficult time – *Collateral Damage: Britain, America and Europe in the Age of Trump*. His forced resignation after one of his confidential memos to the Foreign Office was leaked to the Daily Mail ends his story, and explains why his honesty about Trump's terrible policies caused such a ruckus. It's a most compelling and brilliant read. [JM]

REVIEW OF LAST MEETING

Peter Covey-Crump on Charles Kingsley (1819-75)

Peter's account of Kingsley's life was packed with biographical detail and copiously illustrated with fascinating original photographs and documents. Kingsley took a first class degree in classics from Cambridge but his family's great wealth having evaporated, he started out as an impoverished curate in the run-down north Hampshire parish of Eversley. He became rector after his negligent predecessor was



disgraced by a scandalous elopement and then, in spite of being an outspoken radical, he caught the eye of Prince Albert, a contact which opened his path to prestigious appointments — as Queen Victoria's chaplain, tutor to Prince Edward, Regius Professor of History and Canon of Westminster Abbey. He turned to writing to supplement his stipend and went on to publish socio-political novels such as *Alton Locke* and historical stores such as *Hereward the Wake*. His knowledge of marine biology and his love of angling, as well as his concern with injustice, fed into his best-known book, *The Water Babies*, the story of a boy chimney sweep who escapes his abusive master into a cleansing under-water world where he discovers true enlightenment. The book's river scenes owe much to fishing visits to the Itchen while staying at Itchen Abbas and Arlebury House. His health collapsed and he died aged only 55. His beloved wife Frances received handwritten condolences from Queen Victoria. [BT]

POSTSCRIPT: One of Kingsley's daughters became a successful author. She has now been almost entirely forgotten but her books may well be worth revisiting. She is Mary St Leger Kingsley. Glenn has discovered the following link. Free digital editions of seven of her works can be found at [Books: Lucas malet \(sorted by popularity\) - Project Gutenberg](#)

PLANS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

As in past years there will be no meeting in December. Following this month's (November 17th) live meeting in St John's we will resume proper live meetings in this new venue for at least the first three months of 2022. Details will be provided in our December Newsletter, and the Programme for 2022 will follow before Christmas.

IN CONCLUSION:

Don't forget to join us in St John's for a live talk by Peter Pooley at 7.30 pm Wednesday the 17th of November, and let me know if you are willing to help with stewarding etc.

Mike Dickens, Secretary

secretary@alresfordhistandlit.co.uk