

TWENTY FIVE YEARS ON

by John Adams

Alresford Historical and Literary Society

Founded 1966

President: Laurence Oxley



On the bitterly cold evening of Friday, 16th February 1966, eleven hardy citizens of Old and New Alresford gathered in the unheated 'Cottage' room (now housing a Building Society) of the Town Hall in West Street with the intention of forming the Alresford Local History Group. They were Phyllis and John Adams, Kay Hampton, Dr. W. Kean Seymour, Hon. D. Litt, FRSL, Mrs Kean Seymour (Rosalind Wade the novelist) Olivia Mills, Kathleen Pring, Elsi and Fred Tickner, Robert Whitaker and Harry Wood. Sadly most of these founder members have passed on but they left

their mark on what became subsequently the Alresford Historical and Literary Society. In due course a Constitution was drawn up, a Committee, was elected and a regular meeting day and place arranged. Twenty five years on the aims and objects of the Society remain as they were when originally laid down in the beginning. The area covered by the Society has expanded: the original Rules 3 and 4 of the Society are worth quoting in full ;

3.

- a. to investigate, study and record aspects of historical and archaeological interest in the area defined in para. 4.
- b. to invite speakers to address the Society on subjects connected with area covered
- c. to establish and maintain contact with other groups and societies in exchanging visits and speakers to discuss subjects of common interest,

4. The area of activities covered by the Society shall be loosely defined as extending from Four Marks in the east to Itchen Abbas in the west and from Preston Candover in the north to Preshaw in the south.

The founders considered that the literary aspect formed naturally an integral part of local history and this became reflected in the title of the society. Membership increased rapidly and the hundred was topped by 1972, remaining above that ever since. The original admission charge of one shilling per meeting was replaced by an annual subscription. This reached £3.50 in 1985 and with good housekeeping by successive Treasurers has been kept at that figure ever since.

The highly successful Manuscript Meetings were first suggested by William Kean Seymour, poet and author, our first Vice-President. Since then the amount of historical and literary material available in this form and revealed in talks and writings is simply tremendous. Some subjects have been aired time and time again, for example the Itchen Navigation and the Battle of Cheriton, all producing differing views and conclusions.

A programme of three or four annual outings has been maintained; the object has always been to find somewhere out of the ordinary and to give plenty of time for contemplation. Thus we have enjoyed hours of idyllic near silence on a horse drawn barge; buggy rides in the New Forest; river cruises, visits to digs and others.

Some meetings experienced moments of high drama. As on the occasion when the floor of the room collapsed, Then, there was the A.G.M when the Police Ball was being held in the room above and a size thirteen boot appeared through the ceiling. Or when the Cadets again in the room above during their weekly drill grounded arms with shattering effects on the Chairman's Report which was then being read.

We have had our failures too. Two attempts to form a Poetry Circle came to nothing, in spite of such talent among our membership as William Kean Seymour, Rosalind Wade, Lucy Parker, Ursula Oxley and Christine Strannack to mention only a few. An archaeological group was formed but after half a dozen meetings was disbanded for lack of support.

The Annual Dinner has proved to be a great success; guest speakers have included a former ambassador to Washington, a Prince and Princess of the Russian Royal Family, a former Master of the Rolls and many distinguished poets and authors.

So now the Society looks forward to another twenty five years of progress supported by new members who are re-enforcing and maintaining the standards set out by the old.

John Adams May 1991