

Sarratt Local History Society

'Famous People of The Chilterns' by Chris Brown

Chris Brown, who lives in Cholesbury and is an active member of the Chiltern Conservation Board, started his talk with a succinct summary of the geology and geography of the Chalk Escarpment that forms what we know as The Chilterns.

He then made a very personal choice, from a large possible selection of famous people who had lived, worked or walked in the area.

He started with Rupert Brooke the 'Grantchester' poet who died in Greece during the First World War, but had been fond of walking the area between Tring and Wendover before the War at a time when Virginia Woolfe described him as "a new Pagan, a bit of a ragamuffin! But no local descriptions seem to occur in his poems.

Of more interest was John Bunyan, whose extraordinary work, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, became almost an adjunct to the Bible for many Protestants in this country and was not only widely read from the 17th Century until the early 20th Century but many phrases from which have entered the English Language. He, it seems was born in Bedfordshire and used to walk for miles from Dunstable across The Chilterns. Indeed it is said that his famous description of the view of 'the Celestial City' was based on his view of London, as it was in the 17th Century, from high in the Chiltern Hills. As a result of reading the book people started to visit the area almost as pilgrims.

Surprisingly the speaker did not chose to mention John Milton, Bunyan's contemporary, author of *Paradise Lost*, who lived and wrote in what is now known as Milton's Cottage, in Chalfont St. Giles. He chose instead a less spiritual but certainly, now, as widely read a writer, Agatha Christie, who bought a house in Wallingford in the 1930s on which she possibly based Miss Marple's imaginary village of St Mary Meade.

Benjamin Disraeli, Queen Victoria's favourite Prime Minister, bought the Manor House at Hughenden which he later transformed into the fine but comfortable home we can now visit, and chose nearby Beaconsfield for his title. He loved the area and he was, of course, a novelist as well as a politician so maybe the Chiltern Hills inspire people to write.

The next choice is probably an unknown name to most of us, but was the founder of what is now the top academic school in England! It is Wycombe Abbey, near Wycombe and was founded by Dame Frances Dove in 1896 as one of the new type of schools for young women, starting with Queen's College, Harley St and going rapidly on to Cheltenham Ladies College and North London Collegiate. Dame Frances was a suffragette, a JP and learned to drive at the age of 74.

William Morris, Lord Nuffield, established his iconic motor manufacturing business in Oxford where he grew up and in his final years lived in Nettlebed. He presumably drove some of his prototype cars in the Chilterns. Amy Johnson, the

pilot, apparently went glider flying from Woburn Green, which would certainly have provided a fresh view of the area.

John Nash, the WWI artist whose landscapes are so evocative of that terrible period, actually lived in Chalfont St. Peter and he did many of his finest paintings in the Chilterns. I think John Bunyan, the inventor of the 'Slough of Despond', would have appreciated Nash's haunting pictures.

I think we could describe Chris Brown's choice of people as 'eclectic!

The Sarratt Local History Society's next meeting will be on Tuesday 19 May in Sarratt School, when Michael Lee will talk about Local Canals : The Changing Scene.

Angela Colman

Sarratt Horticultural Society Spring Show

This Show was probably one of the very best of the last few years with 49 entrants including 10 children and over 300 entries. During the afternoon the Show was visited by a very large number of people, both Villagers and visitors from elsewhere.

The prizes were widely distributed with Christine Head the overall Show winner. Vice-Presidents John Rickard and Joan North won the Pinaroo Trophy for Daffodils and the WI Cookery Cup respectively. Show Secretary Jennifer Haynes won the Luckhaus Plate for Arts and Crafts whilst Christine Head won the Dickens Trophy for Other Flowers and joined Joan Horwood and Steven Booth in sharing the Roy Ward Trophy for Vegetables, Fruit and Produce, (this including Eggs of which there were more entries than usual). Sue Hall won the Toots Downer Cup for Flower Arranging with Tom Soothill retaining the Dorrett Cup for the Children's classes by a single point from Fiona Cross and Edward Barrington.

It was pleasing that Jon Adams of Adams Nurseries was able to present the prizes to the winners.

Sarratt Wildlife Volunteers

We were again at Commonwood on Sunday April 12 as there is so much to do there. We were very fortunate to have Brenda and Gordon Harold's son-in-law and two teenage grandsons to help, which made eight strong men altogether. We were working alongside Bottom Lane, clearing some of the fallen and cut trees, some of them quite large, so we needed lots of muscle power as we can only use hand tools. We moved the debris to create a 'dead hedge' along the road edge, and before too long a large area was cleared, which will allow the ground flora to thrive with more light. Altogether a good morning's work, making that area look cared for. **There will be NO TASK IN MAY, so we shall meet again at Commonwood on Sunday 14 June, 10am in the Car Park.** Please come and help if you possibly can. We shall be clearing yet more of the debris left by the felling, and hunting out any Small Balsam plants that may remain. **Just turn up on the day, or for more info. tel Dawn, 267071, or Brenda, 269956.**