

## Sarratt Local History Society

What do William the Conqueror and General de Gaulle, Geoffrey Chaucer, William Cowper and Grahame Greene, Thomas Coram's Foundling Hospital and Cooper's Patent Sheep Dip have in common? The answer is Berkhamsted. Jenny Sherman of the Berkhamsted History and Museum Society faced a formidable task in giving members of the Society a taste of the colourful and action packed history of this wonderful town.

There is little mystery in searching for the key factors in its successful development. A Chiltern gap town with the little river Bulborne running through it and the common 600ft above it to the north, its long high street stand on the line of the Roman Akeman Street, linking St Albans to Bicester and the Welsh marches. There was possibly a Saxon encampment north of the river when William the Conqueror received the submission of the leading nobles and churchmen of England before going on to Westminster Abbey to be crowned King of England on Christmas Day 1066. Here his kinsman, the Count de Mortmain, built a fine motte and bailey caste in wood which was rebuilt in stone in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. This royal connection gave tremendous prestige to the town throughout the middle ages – to this day it is still part of the Duchy of Cornwall.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the castle passed into the hands of commoners whose sympathies were Parliamentary during the Civil War. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries though benefiting from firstly the building of the Grand Union Canal, the first long distance navigation carrying goods to and from London and the industrial heartlands, and later the building of the first passenger –carrying long distance railway in the world, the town ceded to Hemel Hempstead the poll position of leading West Hertfordshire Borough. This beautifully illustrated talk whetted our appetites for a tour of the town promised for next year. Details will be in the Society's programme for 2008.

*The next meeting of the Society will be on Tuesday 27 November in Sarratt School when the speaker will be Terry Simmonds on 'Chipperfield Garden Scene – 100 years in the making'*