

# Cholesbury-cum-St Leonards Local history Group

NEWSLETTER No. 5  
2001/2002

## Chairman's Introduction

It has been a busy and successful year for the Local History Group. In addition to interesting speakers on local subjects ranging from film and television locations to the navvies who built the London to Birmingham Railway, there were two very enjoyable and sociable members' evenings. In February we learnt about the history of the Cabinet Office from Caroline Coates and about Railway Time from Chris Brown; and in May Betty Gomm presented historical slides from the Group's collection in conjunction with a display of material from the Black Box archive. Although our attendances were slightly down on the previous year, averaging some 37, we can but sympathise with those members, past and present, who were unable to attend the season's meetings. Reports appear elsewhere in the Newsletter about last September's Millennium Event and this year's summer outing to the Dacorum Historical Trust's collection at Berkhamsted. Members will wish me to thank George Cobby and Shirley Blomfield in particular for the efforts they put into arranging all of these events.

As the Newsletter reaches its fifth edition it is pleasing to note that more contributions are forthcoming. Nevertheless I am sure that many other members have knowledge of local topics about which the Newsletter's readers would like to hear and I urge you to commit them to paper for future publication.

The programme for 2001/2002 promises to be as enjoyable as last season's and your committee looks forward to seeing you all again in October.

*David Ridgwell*

## Millennium Event at Cholesbury Village Hall - Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> September 2000

Twelve months ago we were working towards putting on this event and I would like to express my thanks to all those members of the Local History Group and others who did so much towards making it a successful day despite the awful weather – if you remember, it rained all day.

For all that the weather tried to do its worst, we had a larger than anticipated number of visitors. Although it meant that very few people walked around the Iron Age camp following the guide produced by Brigid Farmer, there was lots of interest in the exhibits in both the Village Hall and St Laurence Church at Cholesbury.

Cliff Eastabrook, The Travelling Talesman, was a great success and the Village Hall had exhibits on loan from Buckinghamshire County Museum and from Mr Ernie Collier together with John Horn's books of photographs, photographs from the Black Box, items relating to Hawridge and Cholesbury School and old documents on display for the first time.

The Local History Group is now looking after the replica of the Bronze Age sword found at Hawridge, which David Parish, a County Museum conservator, made specially for the exhibition.

In the Church there were demonstrations on pillow-lace, spinning and straw-plaiting as well as Church items on display. Members of the extended Brackley family put on a display of their family history and Chris Brown demonstrated the use of modern technology with the Cholesbury website and the Parish Map on his laptop computer. Chris had also made a jigsaw map of the parish showing the old boundaries of the four villages.

Outside the Village Hall, Dick Charles very bravely set up and continued with his bodging throughout the day and gazebos were provided for the sale of Millennium Mugs and refreshments.

Particular thanks to all who acted as stewards and in other ways on the day, to Joan and David Barnard for opening their house for the demonstrators to have lunch and to Joan, Paddy Thomas, Jane Howarth and Brigid Farmer for making up the working group.

The Event was aided by Millennium Lottery funding, which enabled it to go ahead; but without the efforts and support of everyone it would not have been the success that it was.

*Shirley Blomfield*

Cholesbury-cum-St Leonards Local History Group is an amateur society founded in the early Sixties to stimulate interest in the Hilltop Villages. A regular feature has been the talks by guest speakers, be they acknowledged experts or enthusiastic amateurs, and the emphasis is naturally on subjects local to the Chilterns.

No one who delves into history comes away without regretting a lack of documentation on some aspect or other. The Group has built up a fairly substantial archive of local documents, maps and photographs, but this can never be complete and additions from any source are welcome, however trivial they may seem. Help us to record today what may not exist tomorrow, whether it be a building or a bus-service!

But hurry! the bus service has already all but disappeared.

## 2001 – 2002 PROGRAMME

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<b>FRIDAY 5 OCTOBER 2001</b> 8.00pm for 8.15pm <b>Cholesbury Village Hall</b>	<b>WADDESDON MANOR: A RESTORATION STORY</b>  Mr Tony Crawforth
<b>FRIDAY 2 NOVEMBER 2001</b> 8.00pm for 8.15pm <b>St Leonards Parish Hall</b>	<b>PEOPLE &amp; ARTEFACTS IN THE CHILTERNs: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL VIEWPOINT</b>  Mrs Barbara Hurman
<b>FRIDAY 7 DECEMBER 2001</b> 8.00pm for 8.15pm <b>St Leonards Parish Hall</b>	<b>THE MYTH OF METROLAND</b>  Mr Julian Hunt
<b>FRIDAY 4 JANUARY 2002</b> 8.00pm for 8.15pm <b>St Leonards Parish Hall</b>	<b>A HISTORY OF ST MARY'S, HEMEL HEMPSTEAD AND ITS ENVIRONS</b>  Mrs Elizabeth Buteux
<b>FRIDAY 1 FEBRUARY 2002</b> 8.00pm for 8.15pm <b>St Leonards Parish Hall</b>	<b>MEMBERS' EVENING</b> Members and visitors are welcome to a social evening when some of our members will give short talks on subjects of their choice
<b>FRIDAY 1 MARCH 2002</b> 8.00pm for 8.15pm <b>St Leonards Parish Hall</b>	<b>IMAGES OF OLD ST ALBANS</b>  Mrs Ann Wheeler
<b>FRIDAY 5 APRIL 2002</b> 8.00pm for 8.15pm <b>St Leonards Parish Hall</b>	<b>A TOUR OF THE PARISH CHURCHES OF MID- BUCKINGHAMSHIRE</b>  Mr Michael Hardy
<b>Friday 3 MAY 2002</b> 8.00pm SHARP  <b>Cholesbury Village Hall</b>	<b>ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING followed by THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS HOUSES AROUND THE CHILTERNs</b>  Mrs Vivienne Evans

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**MEMBERSHIP £5.00 PER ANNUM VISITORS WELCOME: £2.00 PER MEETING**

*Coffee and Biscuits served and a collection is taken*

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## About the Speakers

*Mr Tony Crawforth* joined the Rothschilds as Head of the Manor from 1984 to 1996 and was responsible for organising the Centenary Restoration. He is currently working in Heritage Management Studies at the University of Buckingham.

*Mrs Barbara Hurman* is an archaeologist, ceramics specialist and illustrator, currently (2001) working in Bulgaria.

*Mr Julian Hunt*, an old friend of the Local History Group, is Buckinghamshire County Records and Local Studies Manager.

*Mrs Elizabeth Buteux* is Chairman of Hemel Hempstead History Society and Director of Dacorum Heritage Trust.

*Mrs Ann Wheeler* is Keeper of Social History of the Museum of St Albans.

*Mr Michael Hardy* has had a lifelong interest in old churches. His architectural researches are embodied in audio-visual presentations that have been highly praised throughout the Chilterns.

*Mrs Vivienne Evans* is founder and Chairman of Dunstable History and Heritage Studies.

*George Cobby*

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## Snippets

[www.cholesbury.com](http://www.cholesbury.com)

Last year following on from the Parish Map for the year 2000 we launched a website to provide information about the community including articles about its local history. Details of the Local History Group's events are also provided. If you have access to the web please take the opportunity to visit the site and let us have any comments and suggestions as to what else could be included. Please call Chris Brown (01494-758890).

### "Leaves on the Line"

A treat is in store for ferroequinologists this winter. Not only do we have Julian Hunt addressing the Local History Group in December on The Myth of Metroland but also Buckinghamshire County Museum is mounting an exhibition in their Aylesbury Art Gallery about the spread of railways in the Chilterns and the 'Golden Years of Metroland'. Curator Steve Sinden told us that the exhibits will include posters, memorabilia and models as well as presentations of archive film. The exhibition will run from 22 September 2001 to 21 April 2002.

### Local History Group News

Cholesbury Camp has at last reopened after the foot-and-mouth crisis and the Committee hopes soon to have the additional information boards erected. An additional filing cabinet has been acquired to accommodate Black Box archive material; our President and Archivist, Mrs Evelyn Money, and her intrepid band of assistants are already hard at work indexing and storing a wealth of irreplaceable documents.

### A meeting with Mr Brown

Your editor was pleased to meet a former resident of Buckland Common, Mr Brown, who was out badger-spotting one July evening along Grim's Ditch. Mr Brown, who is now 81 years old, went to school in St Leonards and well remembers visiting *The Britannia* in Bottom Road and *The Rose and Crown* (later renamed *The Horse and Hounds*). Asked if his family were connected with *Browns Rise*, Mr Brown said that was a different family with 13 children: one was a JP and another had the brickyard in Shire Lane – he remembered that the house called *Overburnt* on Cholesbury Common was so named because it was built from the overburnt bricks from the kiln!

### Additions to the Library

Following her talk, Heather Falvey presented the Group with a copy of her degree dissertation *Most Riotous, Routous and Unlawful Behaviour: enclosure and unrest in Berkhamsted*. It has been added to the library together with the latest volume of the *Records of Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society* (Vol.41, 2001).

Members may borrow any of the small collection of books belonging to the Group and a list may be obtained from Paddy Thomas on 01494-758460.

# Beating the Cholesbury Bounds

## Introduction

A tradition revived in Cholesbury-cum-St Leonards in recent times has been the periodic 'beating of the bounds'. This custom would have occurred regularly around the manors and church parish boundaries that historically constituted the parish. A beating of the bounds ceremony occurred in April 1974 to celebrate the 40th anniversary of establishment of the civil parish and the late Dr Arnold Baines published an excellent account in the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Record\*, noting such events as the cutting of crosses and parishioners pausing where boundaries with two other parishes occur. Subsequent 'beatings' took place to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee in 1977, and in April 1984 and 1994. Information about walks prior to 1974 would be welcome.

## The rituals and their origins

The custom of 'beating the bounds' has existed in Britain for well over 2000 years. Its origins are unclear although it can be found within many different cultures across Europe and beyond. It involves people perambulating their farm, manorial, church or civic boundaries, pausing as they pass certain trees, walls and hedges that denote the extent of the boundary to exclaim, pray and ritually 'beat' particular landmarks with sticks of birch or willow. The English folk-song "Stripping The Willow" is a relatively modern record of these practices.

When literacy or map-reading were not widespread skills, processions every seven or ten years served to ensure boundaries were known by local people and had not been encroached by neighbouring landowners. Other activities associated with these rituals also survived. At certain points on the boundary, young boys were held upside down and had their heads bumped on a marker stone. In past times adolescent boys might also be 'switched' (hit with willow wands), thrown over hedges, into brambles or ponds or required to climb up chimneys or over roofs. These actions may have originally had a darker significance but in more recent times ensured the imprinting of the exact location of a boundary on successive generations of the community.

Before the Roman invasion of Britain rituals connected with Spring were performed each year as part of the pagan festival of Beltane. Birch twigs or besoms were struck against the boundary marks. The Romans brought the worship of gods such as Pan or Faunus to ensure fertility and purification of the land. Similar Viking traditions and festivals involved the worship of gods such as Frigga, Freya and Eostre and became incorporated within Anglo-Saxon laws and customs.

Beating the bounds played an important part in reinforcing Anglo Saxon charters and the royal and baronial charters of the later medieval period. The ceremonial procession also served to reinforce the power the charter-holder had over tenants and serfs and was an important means of asserting the primacy of the law in defining the rights of tenants.

## Early Christian ceremonies

In Britain, 'beating' of a parish boundary for both the Christian and legal ceremonies became interwoven as church jurisdiction succeeded that of the manorial estates. Christianity, which probably arrived in Britain by the 4th or 5th century AD, adopted a number of pagan, Roman and Anglo-Saxon festivals and customs.

The celebration of Spring ('Rogantide') as part of the Roman Church's litany reached England around the 8th century. Rogantide derives from the Latin *rogatio* to intercede, ask or beseech, Rogation days being the time of the year when God's blessing was sought for the seeds sown in Spring. The Christian event evolved into a procession with banners depicting the saints, chanting from the Scriptures and erecting stone crosses at intersections with other parishes. Occasionally processions would meet and disputes over precise boundaries might erupt.

During the reign of Elizabeth I the unification of church and state led to the event becoming a more subdued affair and Cromwell banned all such celebrations.

## **Incorporation into modern Christianity**

The modern feast of Rogantide (originally a period of fasting) is celebrated during the week before Ascension Day, the fifth week after Easter. 'Easter' derives from the pre-Christian worship of Eostre, the goddess of Spring. During Rogantide the priest led the congregation in ceremonial procession around the lands falling within ecclesiastical jurisdiction. During each pause at a boundary mark the priest would give a blessing thanking the Lord for the bountiful earth and praying for the seeds to grow and flourish. This gave names to marking points such as *Gospel Oak* and *Amen Corner*.

## **Parish Maps**

Today maps show the parish boundaries. However reliance on maps may result in ancient rights of way being forgotten. Maps sometimes fail to reflect accurately the boundaries of commons and village greens or precise routes of footpaths and bridleways. Often these are unfenced, and local people may not only be unsure about the boundaries, but totally unaware that this land has any special status. Our Parish Map produced for the Millennium is another way of ensuring that knowledge about the locality is not lost.

*Chris Brown*

A useful account of the value of Parish Maps can be found on the Common Ground website  
<http://www.commonground.org.uk>

- Ref: Dr A.H.J. Baines Buckinghamshire Archaeological Record 1985

## **Summer Outing to DACORUM HERITAGE TRUST, Berkhamsted**

The address of the Trust is "The Museum Store", and this is exactly what it is. Our small group of intrepid local historians met at the store, in an obscure part of Berkhamsted alongside Meals on Wheels, the National Blood Service and WVS. We were, unfortunately, restricted on numbers and the first thing we did was to split into two smaller groups.

We huddled into a small office containing various items of bric-a-brac and the inevitable computer. Our host, Curator Matthew Wheeler, gave us an outline of the trust's background and functions. Surprisingly there is no local history museum in Dacorum and as a result many valuable pieces of material have been lost. A Museum Advisory Committee was set up in 1979 and Dacorum appointed a Heritage Officer, leading to the Heritage Trust. They acquired the old Fire Station, where we were now situated, and used it as a store for local history societies. They also have access to temporary sites throughout the Borough and have some display equipment. The objective is to have photographic and written records of all museum contents and we were given an impressive demonstration of the computer database, which is updated with help from friends of the trust.

We then moved on through the store, seeing some interesting old posters (professionally renovated), maps, postcards and other memorabilia of the Borough. The Trust keeps a continuing record, and stores several time capsules as well as current memorabilia like a stick of Hemel Hempstead rock (Yes, it goes all the way through).

We then changed places with the other group and met Ann Nath, representing the local archaeological society. She described several important local "finds" and explained that all the best stuff is in the British Museum, including a Roman legionnaire's helmet. An important site in Dacorum is the Roman villa at Gadebridge, dated about AD75. This contained, among other things, the second largest Roman swimming pool in England, the largest being at Bath. Other Roman sites were situated at one-mile intervals along Akeman Street, with just one missing site at Berkhamsted, although some Roman remains have been found there.

We saw various pieces of old coins and pottery, including bronze-age cremation urns dating to about 2,000 BC and I was surprised to find that much of the tessera (old pottery shards) is thrown away, as there is so much about. Lesson of the day - when you throw tessera away, be careful you don't leave it in a place where future archaeologists will find it and enthusiastically start a new dig!

Finally we looked at more recent additions to the collection including my favourite, a model beam engine. Thanks to all concerned for a very interesting evening.

*David Clarke*

## No room at the Mill - the artist MARK GERTLER at Cholesbury

I was very interested in David Ridgwell's account of his visit to the Ashmolean Museum and his discovery of Mark Gertler's painting of Cholesbury Mill entitled *Gilbert Cannan and his Mill*.

My great aunt and uncle, Lucy and Albert Gomm, used to live at The Gables, on the right as one approaches the Mill, and it was with Great Aunt Lucy that Mark Gertler used to lodge on his visits to Gilbert Cannan, when there was no room at the Mill.

Mark Gertler was not very complimentary about his visits to Aunt Lucy's house – he wrote to Lytton Strachey protesting that it was bitterly cold and “Mrs Gomm's rooms looked so hideous this time, texts and pictures crammed all over the walls: ‘Simply to Thy Cross I cling’; ‘Sweet Seventeen, Sweeter Seventy’; portraits of Queen Victoria, china and so on! Too bad! On all the chairs were pieces of intricate lace [antimacassars]. Every time I sat down on my chair, my hair would entangle in the lace.” Although requested to do so, my aunt refused to remove the lace. My second cousin, the granddaughter of Aunt Lucy, still has the china ornament of Queen Victoria and the piano that was played by some of the authors and writers.

Gilbert Cannan's residence at Cholesbury resulted in a whole influx of the literati and artists of the time. Eventually, in August 1916, Gilbert Cannan found a cottage at Cholesbury for Mark Gertler to rent at four shillings and sixpence per week. John Middleton Murry and Katherine Mansfield joined with Gordon Campbell, a barrister, and his wife Beatrice in renting another cottage, and D H Lawrence and his wife, Frieda, moved there to join them. Life was hectic in London and Cholesbury, where the Cannans and Murrys gave parties and get-togethers at which plays by Cannan and Gertler were acted.

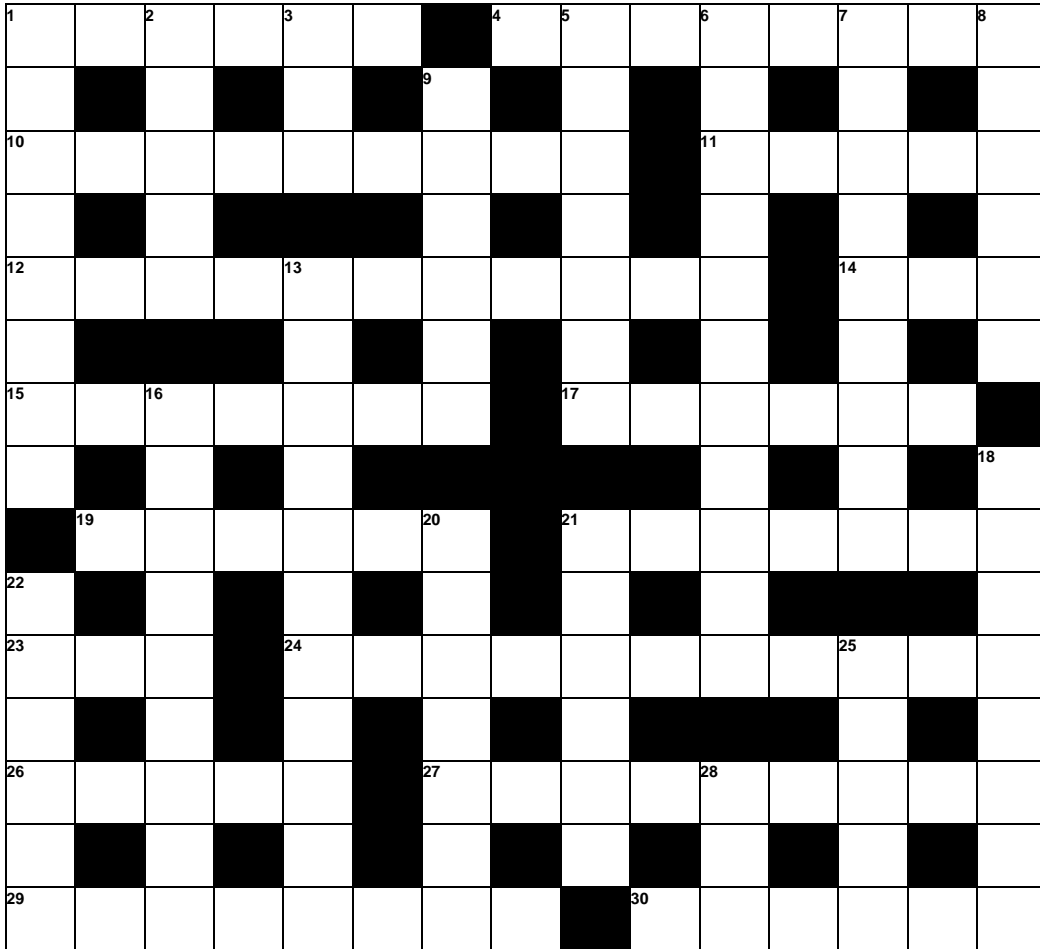
In December 1916 the artist Dora Carrington, the object of Gertler's affections, wrote to Lytton Strachey “Next week I am going to stay with Mark for a week, Gilbert Cannan has lent him his castle [the Mill] for a week. He is going to ask you [Strachey] to come down Wednesday or Thursday”. Gilbert Cannan worked in the top room of the Mill looking towards Chesham. Mark Gertler looked forward to his visits to Cholesbury – “I am going off to the country” he wrote, “it will be a great relief to get away and a pleasure to see dear Gilbert Cannan and listen to his pianola”.

*Sheila Davies*

*Gilbert Cannan was born in Manchester, studied at Manchester and Cambridge Universities, read law and, after practising at the Bar, changed in 1908 to acting and then writing. When Mary Barrie left her husband J M Barrie for Cannan, she brought with her the enormous Newfoundland dog ‘Luath’ which is depicted in Mark Gertler's painting.*

*Mark Gertler was born in 1891 in a slum lodging in the East End but returned with his family to Przemysl in their homeland when their London business failed. After many difficulties the family eventually returned to London where, with help and support from various sources, Mark's artistic talent was recognised. His picture of Gilbert Cannan and his Mill is on the cover of the Ashmolean's recent publication ‘Twentieth Century Paintings’ and another painting, Merry-go-Round, is in the Tate Britain. Gilbert Cannan's roman-à-clef about Gertler, Mendel, was published in October 1916 by T Fisher Unwin Ltd.*

# CROSSWORD PUZZLE



## ACROSS

1. Scientific socialist connected with Manchester (6)
4. An introductory statement (8)
10. William De..... Sheriff of Bucks 1234 (9)
11. The heath genus of plants (5)
12. Bucks village with a name meaning Scobbas Farm (11)
14. The personification of an age (3)
15. "And the scaled ..... owns the mystic rod" – Browning (7)
17. Poet who celebrated Cromwell's death with heroic stanzas – 1655 (6)
19. A legal process or suit (6)
21. A type of oarsman (7)
23. Prelate supposed to have commissioned the Bayeux Tapestry (3)
24. Local noble family noted for their altruism (11)
26. "..... the lion from his lair" – The Talisman, Sir Walter Scott (5)
27. Pond once located near St Leonard's Church (9)
29. Fast cyclists (8)
30. Surname of Royal Concubine with a memorial in Tring Park (6)

## DOWN

1. Carved or moulded in relief (8)
2. African country, independent since 1957 (5)
3. Dark red resin used for dye (3)
5. .... Pint, eg Non imperial beer bottle (7)
6. "Crabbed .../.../..... cannot live together" – Shakespeare (3,3,5)
7. Prison named after a London Palace (9)
8. The lily maid who loved Sir Lancelot, according to Tennyson (6)
9. Location of a steam powered mill in Tring – 1875 (6)
13. An ancient farm in the south of Cholesbury Parish (8,3)
16. An agrarian movement threatening common land (9)
18. The condition of squinting (8)
20. Member of French assembly in Valois period (7)
21. A genus of leguminous plant (6)
22. William ....., a leading pre-Raphaelite (6)
25. A recuperative period (3,2)
28. Home of The Royal Botanical Gardens (3)

Brendan Bearne

## M. R. James in Buckinghamshire

Many of you will be familiar with the ghost stories of Montague Rhodes James, either in print or from the two series of television broadcasts in the early seventies and last Christmas. Such tales as *A Warning to the Curious* and *Casting the Runes* are guaranteed to send a shiver down the spine on a dark winter's night.

Although MRJ was an East Anglian by birth and spent a goodly part of his academic career at Cambridge, becoming Provost of King's College, he had several associations with Buckinghamshire and the Chilterns. As a schoolboy at Eton College he had already developed antiquarian interests. His biographer notes that school holidays provided a chance to explore churches in the vicinity. The favourite was Langley "which offered a pleasant jumble from an ecclesiologist's point of view, an organ to be played and (if the key was obtained) the riches of Sir John Kederminster's library" (visited by the Local History Group in 1999).

In 1882 MRJ visited Ashridge Park, over the Hertfordshire border, when the Eton OTC held its summer camp there. Later in his career, when his reputation as a Christian iconographer had spread, he was invited back by Lord Brownlow to inspect the glass in the house's chapel. MRJ's 1904 pamphlet, *Notes of Glass in Ashridge Chapel*, identifies 120 different subjects in the eleven windows and attributes them to the Premonstratensian church of Steinfeld, Germany, which was the setting for the ghost story *The Treasure of Abbot Thomas*. The Ashridge Glass is now in the Victoria and Albert.

MRJ ended his career back at Eton College as Provost and in 1931-2 served a term as President of Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society, giving his presidential address on 10 March 1932 at Little Missenden House on the subject of *Iconography of Bucks*. In the address, published in *Records of Buckinghamshire vol.12* (a copy of which is held in Chesham Library), MRJ surveys the Christian imagery of the paintings, sculpture, tiles and glass of the parish churches of Buckinghamshire and its borders. Although the churches of the Hilltop Villages do not feature, the closing paragraphs of the article deal with the famous medieval tiles of Tring Church (now also in the Victoria and Albert). MRJ states: "The strange thing about these is their subject, which is the very rare one of the miracles done by our Lord in His infancy, such as His encounters with a schoolmaster, His taming of lions, multiplying of corn, pulling a beam to the right length, raising a boy to life,

pulling another through a crevice in the wall etc. I find exceedingly close parallels to the choice and treatment of these subjects in a Bodleian manuscript of the same date, about 1300, and this leads me to observe that the illustrations in *books* were throughout the centuries, and in all countries, the source of the craftsman's inspiration."

Unfortunately none of MRJ's ghost stories has a Chiltern setting. Most were written in Cambridge but the last few came from Eton and one in particular, *Wailing Wall*, was composed for the Eton Boy Scout troop's camp in Dorset in July 1927. The author's humour is evident from his description of badges a Scout won "for picking up bits of newspaper" and "for not slamming the door when leaving the pupil-room".

*David Ridgwell*

*References:* Montague Rhodes James by *R..W. Pfaff, London 1980*  
The Ghost Stories of M.R. James ed. *Michael Cox, London 1991*  
Records of Buckinghamshire vol.12 (1932) pp.281-298

## Cholesbury-cum-St Leonards Local History Group Committee

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**Website:** [www.cholesbury.com](http://www.cholesbury.com)

