



# Alresford Historical & Literary Society

## NEWSLETTER 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021

A Midsummer Night's Dream, Landseer - 1857



### THE SOCIETY'S PLANS & NEWS

"Can't believe it's June already!" We are still unsure about when we can meet again "properly". Guesses vary: autumn, January and Easter! As a working hypothesis let's take the middle ground and assume we will definitely meet for a talk in the Church on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2022. In the meantime we'll continue with Zoom meetings every month for as long as we have to.

### OUR NEXT MEETING – by Zoom on 16th June at 7.30 pm

Well known Russian expert, author and broadcaster  
Stephen Dalziel presents

*"The Portland Spy Ring". This was broken 60 years ago this year, and was the most damaging case of espionage for British naval interests. It involved two clerks at the Admiralty Underwater Weapons Establishment at Portland, an undercover KGB agent and two fanatical American communists. Unwittingly Lawrence Oxley's antiquarian bookshop became involved and the public toilets near Alresford Station played an important part!*



Here is the Zoom link, which opens at 7.15 pm:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81899297200?pwd=ZHIQdkRBcHRsQ2xHblRIT0tEbC9mdz09>

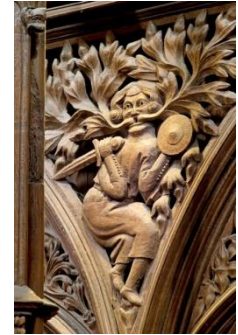
## A REVIEW OF OUR LAST MEETING

We had 49 connections, so counting our couples, we had about 70 members at the meeting.

Roy Weller presented an interesting talk on “Green Men and Swastikas as Ancient International Multicultural Symbols of Joy in Winchester Cathedral”



Roy spoke of the many symbols to be found in the cathedral. The symbol of The Cross is of course ubiquitous but there are other symbols less obviously linked to Christianity. The Green Men are carved faces (and one full body) fused with or surrounded by leaves. These are ancient symbols of rebirth and fertility and date from 2<sup>nd</sup> Century Roman times and also appeared in even earlier times in the Middle East.



A colleague of Roy, cathedral guide Julie Adams, has produced a further reference source to Green Men: <https://www.winchester-cathedral.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/The-Fascination-of-Green-Men-Winchesters-Contribution-by-Julie-Adams.pdf>

But (quelle horreur) swastikas in our cathedral? Roy went on to tell us how this symbol has been used and abused. It was known from about 3,000 BCE in the Indus Valley as representing life, sun, power, strength and good luck, once used worldwide and common in Hinduism and Buddhism. The adoption of the swastika by the Nazi Party in Germany has caused it to become reviled and often illegal in the West, though it is still in use with no stigma attached in the East, for example in China and Japan. While some embroidery examples in the cathedral have been discretely resewn, those in stone on the effigy of Bishop Edington (d.1366) remain! See his “collar” We shall look with added interest when we next visit the cathedral.



## GLIMPSES OF ALRESFORD'S PAST (3)

“OUR MITFORD” by Brian Tippett



The following newspaper notice appeared in 1792: *TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION, on Monday, 29th October, at eleven o'clock. Part of the HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE, most excellent brewing-utensils, a quantity of good strong-beer, about 40 dozen of fine flavoured old red Port, with a large library of choice books in all languages, containing about 400 volumes, and valuable effects, of GEORGE MIDFORD, MD, leaving Alresford.*

The story behind this notice is that in 1792, having run into debt, Dr George Midford (as he then spelled his name) had to resign his medical practice and move away from Alresford with his wife and little daughter, Mary. She later became famous as an author, writing under the name Mary Russell Mitford mainly about the quiet Berkshire village where she lived. But she never forgot Alresford and was proud to say that she was born here. [BT]

A selection from 'Our Village', Mary Russell Mitford's best-known publication, can be read on line at: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2496/2496-h/2496-h.htm>

## **AN AFTERTHOUGHT** – WERE MARY & NANCY MITFORD RELATED?

With the TV adaptation of Nancy Mitford's 'The Pursuit of Love' recently attracting a huge audience, and the continuing notoriety of her fascist and communist sisters, the question inevitably arises: Is there a link between Mary and Nancy, beyond the fact that they shared a surname? Clearly there is no direct line of descent because Mary died unmarried, childless and without siblings in 1855 and her family line died with her. And in many ways including their life-styles and the content of their writings they were completely different. If there is a link it is tenuous and rests on the fact that Mary and Nancy (born 1904) were both descended from Northumberland families which were distantly interconnected. There is more about Mary Russell Mitford and her errant father in the new history of Alresford that will be published by the Society later this year. [BT]

## **FUTURE MEETINGS – 21<sup>st</sup> July**

"International Influences on Southampton Through Time" Wed 21<sup>st</sup> July 7.30 pm.

Online history talk with “See Southampton” tour guide Katie Belo dos Santos (lovely name!). *This talk will encompass ten centuries of foreign influences on the city of Southampton: from merchants to royal visits in medieval and Tudor times, and from the French Huguenots to Paganini and Garibaldi in 1800s, not forgetting the two million troops who passed by in 1944 and our students from overseas!*

## **OUTINGS?** “What, no outings this year?” said Glenn!

Members have been mixed with their comfort with group meetings, even if permitted after June. As a possibility, on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> July we could arrange for a visit to Southampton.

At 11:00 tour guide, local historian and author Martin Brisland will lead a WALKING TOUR: A STROLL THROUGH SOUTHAMPTON'S PARKS (£8) One of the parks is Andrews Park, named after Bishops Sutton lad-made-good Richard Andrews. Our chairman & wife have booked to join this, & tickets are available at <https://www.wegotickets.com/event/515212>.



It would be possible for our Society to book a guided group visit to Southampton Art Gallery, or another guided walk (there are several topics available) at about £5 per head, depending on numbers. Of course, there are several museums and even the West Quay shopping centre. We could arrange a group cream tea. Travel could be by car, bus (64 + 1) or it would be possible to arrange a coach for about £9 per head if enough were interested. Does a day out in Southampton on 22<sup>nd</sup> July appeal? If so, please email [secretary@alresfordhistandlit.co.uk](mailto:secretary@alresfordhistandlit.co.uk) by Friday 11<sup>th</sup> June, indicating whether and what you would wish to join.

**See you Zoomers on 16<sup>th</sup> June** for insights into the dastardly story of Russian spies and their wicked and fascinating activities in Alresford. **PS:** Was it just me or did anyone else judge the recent production of Nancy Mitford's “The Pursuit of Love” to be unworthy of our BBC?

Mike Dickens, Secretary