

Alresford Historical & Literary Society



Newsletter February 2020

# Just Williams

**'Makers, Saviours & Destroyers'**

With Winchester Cathedral Guide - **Anne Withers**

on **Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> February**

7:30 Methodist Church Jacklyns Lane, Alresford. Visitors Welcome: £3:00 at the door.

## Synopsis.

You didn't have to be called William to play a major role in the history of Winchester Cathedral, but it certainly seems to have helped.

**"Just Williams"** celebrates some of the famous or even infamous men of that name who played key roles as makers, saviours and destroyers in the Cathedral's evolution over the centuries.

Shown here: William Waynflete Bishop of Winchester 1447–1486

Anna Withers enjoyed a long career as a teacher of English to both pupils of secondary school age and adult learners. On retirement she became a member of the Guild of Voluntary Guides at Winchester Cathedral, and later, as its Chairman, was privileged to assist in the creation of its recently opened new Kings and Scribes exhibition galleries. She has written various articles on aspects of the cathedral's history, and is currently one of the two tutors responsible for training new guides.



**Newsletter.** Latest copy date for the February issue is February 29<sup>th</sup> 2020 Please note this date  
Please send Copy to Robert Fowler 01962 734125 email to: [secretary@alresfordhistandlit.co.uk](mailto:secretary@alresfordhistandlit.co.uk)

Richard Onslow's talk- Project Nightingale

Rat (or Burrow) Island is a low tidal island, owned by the Ministry of Defence, overlooking Portsmouth Harbour. It is a place where human bones are constantly being exposed by the elements, which led to grisly rumours that it was a dump for the bodies of French prisoners or plague victims. But no one was certain. — no one, that is, until our speaker Richard Osgood, a Ministry archaeologist, set to work with a team of diverse talents.

Their task was to excavate what turned out to be graves burrowed into the island's slopes, to reassemble the bones into skeletons and to subject them to forensic analysis.

The project's success was twofold: at last to explain the history of the burials and also to provide realistic practice and training for ex-service veterans, military police investigators and others.

Hulks (decrepit decommissioned warships just like those in Dickens's *Great Expectations*) once lined Portsmouth harbour. During the Napoleonic years they housed French prisoners of war while their more fortunate compatriots were comfortably billeted in places like Alresford. At other times the hulks housed civilian convicts.

Analysis of the skeletons revealed that all were male, almost all of British birth, and they had been buried respectfully, often in coffins. This dispelled myths about Frenchmen and plagues. These were the graves of British men, probably convicts. BT

### Executive Committee to April 2020

Chair: Glenn Gilbertson 732726

Secretary & Membership:  
Robert Fowler 734125

Treasurer:  
Vic Prior 733380

Newsletter Editor:  
Robert Fowler 734125

Speakers Secretary: Vacant

Hall Steward-  
Andrea Sutton 07799 410229

### **Other Committee Members:**

Brian Davies/ Nancy Webb/Brian  
Tippett/John Miller

Spitfire Memorial.

Our Chairman has now submitted the formal planning application for the Spitfire Memorial at Folly Hill, Itchen Stoke.

We can now proceed with further detailed grant applications and quotes for the building works with completion hopefully this year.

### **Recommended Reading**

'**Appeasing Hitler**' by Tim Bouverie, very well reviewed last autumn. A comprehensive and eminently readable account of the failure of Britain's politicians and diplomats to prevent the domination of Europe by Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime. This is a brilliant debut by former political journalist, Tim Bouverie, detailing the rise of Hitler from the early 1930's to the fall of France in the summer of 1940. He examines every aspect of Britain's repeated attempts to satisfy Hitler's growing demands to extend Germany's power in Central Europe. Recommended by P. Pooley



'**The Anarchy**' by William Dalrymple, about India from the disintegration of the Mughal empire to the Mutiny, charting the astonishing rise of the East India Company. Both look like heavy scholarly volumes, but are in fact very readable. The Anarchy is a popular history book on the East Indian Company (EIC) in 18th Century India. Dalrymple regale us the rise of the EIC from a Tudor privateering operation full of ex-Caribbean privateers to an imperial power. Recommended by P. Pooley

"**The Vanquished**" – Why the First World War Failed to End, 1917-1923" by Robert Gerwarth This is an excellent study of the various conflicts that arose out of the debris of World War I. It gives the lie to several myths that are popular in the UK such as:

- Hostilities ceased at 11.00 am on November 11th, 1918
- Britain only got involved in the war to save France and Belgium from German aggression.

Recommended by G. Gilbertson

## Visit of African Queen Mother to Alresford- December 2019

It was a complete surprise when the Secretary of the Alresford Historical Society was contacted by a Ghanaian lady late last month who wished to enquire about meeting Captain George Bower's widow regarding the visit of his ship to Ghana in 1970. Luckily it was known that Captain Bower's widow, Lois, was still living locally and the Society was able to put the two parties in touch so that they could meet.

Through subsequent correspondence with Mrs Lois Bower a request was made for the Queen Mother of the Ashanti tribe (officially known as Saa Pog'Naa Asantewaa Abobio 11), to visit and consequently she arrived on December 28<sup>th</sup>, together with her assistant. Captain Bower and Mrs Bower were longstanding members and ex chairmen of the Alresford Historical and Literary Society.



Her Royal Highness Saa  
Pog'Naa Asantewaa Abobio 11



Captain George Bower in 1970

George Bower was Captain of the Frigate *Ashanti* visiting Tema Naval Port in Ghana whilst on the Beira patrols in 1970. From there he made a courtesy call to the Ashanti people in Kumasi where he was well received by a full tribal council meeting at their Palace, including the absolute Monarch Asantehene.



Her Royal Majesty, dressed in ceremonial cloak and headdress greeted Lois in the traditional manner with hands clasped in front. Formal titles were used in the introductions and tea was taken with Mrs Bower and Robert Fowler, Secretary of the AHLS. During her visit Mrs Bower read from her husband George's personal diaries for the period relating to his time in Ghana. In response the Queen Mother was able to show her own photographs and memorabilia. The Queen Mother was also able to explain that she was on a mission to promote the Anglo Ashanti War Memorial Project which is based in both Kent and Ghana as well as research the the story of the Ashanti Frigate and the ships visit to Ghana in 1970.

She explained that she is visiting Ashanti war graves around the world as a means of respect to others. A convivial two hours was spent discussing past and current affairs, taking photographs and exchanging gifts before the Queen Mother was obliged to depart on her journey. .RSF



The young Queen Mother is a regarded as the Reincarnation Successor of the legendary Ghanaian warrior Yaa Asantewaa who fought the British in 1900 over what was known as the “War of the Golden Stool” The Golden stool, which was of great ceremonial importance to the Ashanti tribe, was considered an essential trophy as part of the British efforts to subdue the local population. The young Queen mother always carries her replica stool with her on her travels.

Above: A travelling replica of the Golden Stool

The original Queen Mother of the Ashanti, Nana Yaa Asantewaa (See Picture below) is still honoured today.

Although a woman, Yaa Asantewaa showed great courage, inspired her warriors and became famous for leading the Ashanti rebellion in the ‘War of the Stool’. She was eventually captured and exiled to the Seychelles where she died in October 1921. After her death she was made a Saint in honour of her struggle of suffering against the British.



The young Queen Mother Saa Pog'Naa Yaa Asantewaa Ababio II wishes for all such powerful women around the world to know about the heroic life of her ancestor, who always promoted women’s emancipation as well as gender equality.

Today the story of Queen Mother Yaa Asantewaa’s courage and leadership is taught throughout primary schools in Ghana as an inspiration to young girls.

Saa Pog'Naa Yaa Asantewaa Ababio II has been visiting Ashanti graves in the UK to pay her respects to those fallen in battle. Her Royal Majesty was educated in England and has spent time in many places around the world, including Japan where her father was Ambassador for Ghana for 15 years.

Above: Nana Yaa Asantewaa. Showing her breasts to demonstrate that she was a woman