



# Alresford Historical & Literary Society

## Newsletter March 2026

**Next Meeting on Wed 18<sup>th</sup> March 7.30 pm in The Methodist Church  
Dr John K Lander will present a talk on *The Women's Land Army in Hampshire*  
which is the subject of his recently-published book: "*Don't Delay - Enrol Today*"**

The hugely valuable contributions made by Women's Land Army members to the maintenance of adequate food supplies for the British population during both 20th century world wars was insufficiently recognised at the time, and for many years afterwards.

Hampshire played a major part in the selection, training and placement of Land Girls on farms. With a highly effective War Agricultural Executive Committee and dedicated local executive decision makers, it has been claimed that pro rata to its population, Hampshire recruited more Land Girls than any other English county. They undertook hard, physical work, in all weathers, often a long way from their homes, received modest pay and little holiday entitlement. [JL]



### ***The Watercress Line Through Time - a project funded by our Arthur Stowell Fund***

The Arthur Stowell Fund is a part of our Society's funds earmarked for the promotion of a love of local history amongst children. In the recent past we have used it jointly with Alresford Town Trust to fund projects including Timelines for Ropley Primary School and the Sun Hill Infant School.



Our final project from the Arthur Stowell Fund is designed to show the **history of the Watercress Line** via a series of **portable exhibition displays** which visitors, particularly children, will enjoy. The money granted was sufficient also to have made a very jolly children's video: [Watercress Line Video](#)

### **The Alresford Museum, operated by The New Alresford Town Trust**

The Town Trust operates the museum under the guidance of Roy Gentry with the objective of providing a working museum for the town. The mixed and varied collection, built up over many years, needs cataloguing and an accessions register compiling. If any member of the Society is interested in assisting with this work, please contact Charles Ackroyd: 07986 617606 / [cackroyd@gmail.com](mailto:cackroyd@gmail.com).

Mike Dickens, Hon Secretary, [secretary@alresfordhistandlit.co.uk](mailto:secretary@alresfordhistandlit.co.uk), 01962 736625

see page 2 for some comments from Glenn on last month's talk

## Some comments from Glenn Gilbertson on our February meeting which featured a talk by Paul Beaver: *Mitchell – Father of the Spitfire*

Despite vile weather, a good audience enjoyed an informative and entertaining evening by prolific author Paul Beaver. We were introduced to the story of R.J. Mitchell (subject of Paul's latest book), who emerged from the midlands world of railway engineering to become chief engineer and director of Supermarine Aviation in Southampton. The company, with a riverside factory on the Itchen, mainly built seaplanes and flying boats using skilled craftsmen rather than mass production methods.

The Schneider Trophy, an international speed contest for seaplanes, was held at various locations around the world, starting with Monaco in 1913 and ending over the Solent. The trophy was awarded permanently to Britain by virtue of three consecutive victories by the British entrants in 1927, 1929, and 1931. The races drew enormous crowds, and Mitchell became famous as the designer of all the last three winners. The last, the S.6B also became the first over 400mph holder of the world air speed record.

The racers brought prestige and advanced technology, but Paul pointed out Mitchell's contemporaneous, contrasting but money-making Walrus fleet spotter and air-sea rescue amphibian. Sadly, by 1934 Mitchell was suffering from colon cancer (also the fate of many of his management team!); his experience of a coloscopy and stoma led to his design of a valve for the coloscopy bag which is still the standard today.

Finally, Mitchell is famous as the designer of the iconic Spitfire, though he only lived long enough to see the flight from Eastleigh of the first prototype, dying aged 42 in 1937.



S.6B



Walrus



Spitfire prototype

Paul touched on the astonishing development of the Spitfire from the Mk.I to the naval Seafire Mk.47, the early production problems with wartime dispersed production in Hampshire plus its symbolism for the area and the nation. Over 22,000 were built between 1936 & 1949.



**Mk.I** 1938 1030hp, max. 6,200lb., 362m.p.h., 31,900ft. **Mk.47** 1952 2,350hp, max.12,750lb., 451mph, 43,100ft.

Rather than take a personal fee, Paul asked that the society contribute towards the National Spitfire Monument – a 40m high sculpture to be erected in Southampton's Mayflower Park.

G.M.G.

