

Lecture Reports

Thursday 14th September 2006

The History of Banbury's Boatyard and Canal – Matthew Armitage

Report held over to our Spring 2007 issue, to accompany an article on Tooley's Yard.

Thursday 12th October 2006

From Knights to Dames in the history of Temple Balsall – Beryl Ellerslie

This was a highly factual account of the evolution of Temple Balsall near Solihull revolving around the Old Hall, a local headquarters of the Knights Templar from the twelfth century, and the associated nearby church built circa 1320.

Originating with nine French knights who in 1118 had banded together to provide protection to pilgrims to the Holy Land, these monastic knights of the Order of the Temple of Solomon, or Templars, soon established a base in Jerusalem. Initially poor soldier knights, they attracted others to the cause and gradually accumulated substantial funds. They acquired Balsall from Roger de Mowbray and the name was altered to Temple Balsall. Other land in Warwickshire came their way but Temple Balsall was the headquarters of a substantial estate and training establishment. As the slides revealed they dressed in striking black or white mantles according to status but all wore the red crusader's cross, as do their Masonic namesakes today.

Early in the fourteenth century, the order fell foul of the King of France and the Pope. They were arrested, stripped of their possessions and most tortured and executed for supposed crimes. Their possessions at Temple Balsall passed to the Knights of St John (the 'Hospitallers'), another order whose roots were in the Holy Lands and founded about the same time as the Templars. Sadly little is known about their time at Temple Balsall except that they ceased residence there in the 1470s. Subsequently their possessions were listed and valued for Henry VIII. These included the Old Hall, a part timber and part stone structure.

Beryl Ellerslie concluded her talk with some account of the Church restoration work and how today Temple Balsall has developed into a thriving Christian Community based on an initial seventeenth century foundation by a Lady Leveson for the teaching of children. It is manifested in the Sheltered Court, the Leveson Centre and St Mary's Church.

B.L.

Thursday 9th November 2006

Recent Work of the Oxfordshire Victoria County History – Dr Simon Townley

The idea of having a comprehensive study of a county's history based on original research dates from 1899. Local academics became involved and the series was dedicated to Queen Victoria. Funding was a problem until London University adopted a supervisory role. In Oxfordshire finance has come from Oxfordshire County Council, Oxford University, an independent trust and recently the Lottery Heritage Fund.

Up to the present two thirds of the county has been covered: Bloxham and Banbury, in 1969-72; Volume XVI, Henley, is expected in 2007. New developments also include paperbacks covering Burford and Henley and the creation of a web site for all 260 volumes. Dr Townley commented especially on the enthusiastic support of people with interest in their own local history. At Burford this takes the form of transcribing wills and photographing buildings.

Our speaker then turned his attention to parts of West Oxfordshire in order to show how landscapes can be reconstructed especially with the help of surveys carried out by District Valuers. This was illustrated in some detail by reference to Witney, which like Banbury was a medieval planned town, and to Carterton, which began as smallholdings but boomed with the growth of Brize Norton aerodrome.

Despite the apparent scale of all this challenging work the *VCH* remains a modest organisation faced with the constant problem of having to balance needs across every county.

B.L. and N.A.