

BANBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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The Society has continued to flourish with Thursday lecture meetings regularly filling, or even overflowing, the room at the Banbury Museum. Changes in the fees agreed last year may have caused a slight drop in membership numbers but attendance at the meetings has averaged at least 50 and a record number, also over 50, attended the AGM held at Edgcote House in July by kind permission of Mr and Mrs Allen. Members are also being kept much better in touch with Society news and other related information through the e-mails sent out regularly by Deborah Hayter.

The series of lectures opened with a revealing account of funeral practices in medieval England by Rowena Archer who both fascinated, and possibly repelled, members of the audience with her revelations of the ways in which our ancestors dealt with the disposal of human bodies. This theme of burial was partly carried on by Judith Toms in February who talked about excavations near the site of Pompeii which had revealed massive devastation by an eruption nearly 1800 years before the famous destruction of the town in AD 79. The March lecture related more to the Banbury area being an account of the Oddfellows and other Victorian Friendly Societies given by Ron Greenall. He revealed the extent to which Victorians were dependent on these mutual societies for help in times of need and the very local character which many of the Sick and Benefit Societies retained up to the middle of the twentieth century when they were displaced by the government's National Health scheme.

The summer programme, organised by Beryl Hudson and Fiona Thompson, included a visit to the museum in Charlbury, run entirely by volunteers, followed by a walk round the village to look at some of the more important properties. In May members were given a tour of the Oxford University Press and in June a trip was organised to Chenies Manor House and garden, a semi-fortified brick house built by Sir John Cheyne about 1460. The final event in the summer was the AGM held at Edgcote House, after which Sally Strutt gave a short history of the property before leading members round the main rooms with the owner, David Allen who took tours round the garden.

One of the main items at the AGM was the announcement of the winner of the prize offered earlier in the year for the best local history publication or research. This had excited considerable interest and a total of 16 entries ranging widely from single page articles to complete binders full of data. Jeremy Gibson, Deborah Hayter and Helen Forde formed the judges panel and had been most impressed by the quality and range of the entries.