



Newsletter

The next Marcham Society Zoom Talk is on Monday 24th May 2021 at 7.30

“Beacons of the Past, LiDAR, and woodland archaeology in South Oxfordshire ” by Ed Peveler

Ed Peveler works for the *‘Chilterns Conservation Board’* and for four years Ed has been helping to manage the project called “Beacons of the Past” which has featured on BBC’s Countryfile and has attracted thousands of volunteers searching online for previously unknown archaeological sites in the Chilterns.

Ed will explain how LiDAR (Light, Distance and Ranging) has helped in both our interpretation of the historic landscape and our understanding of the past. He will also give a new view of various archaeological sites in Southern Oxfordshire.

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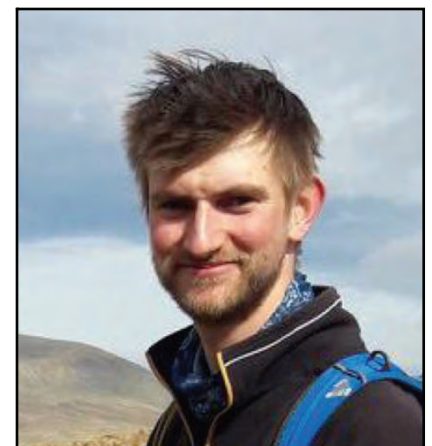
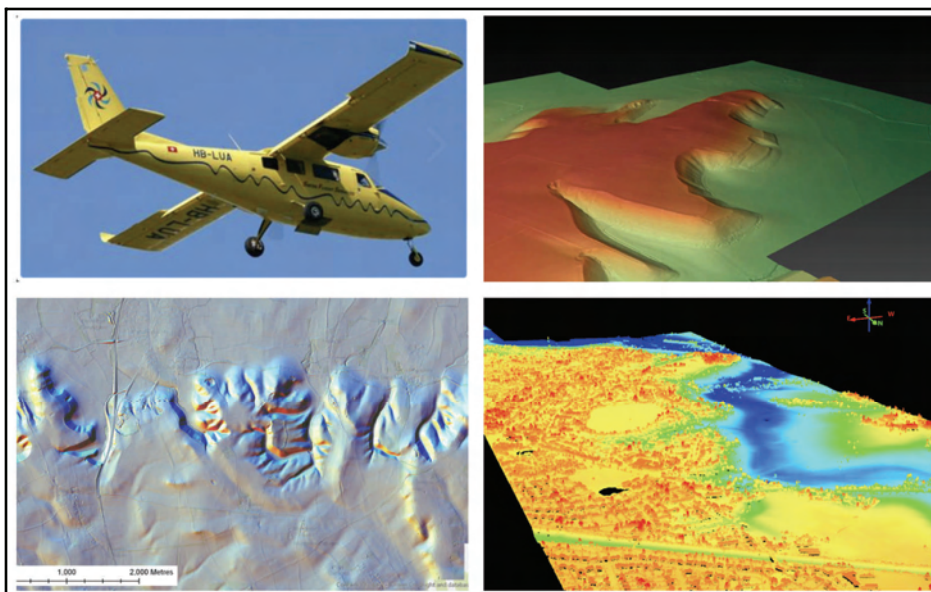
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Ed Peveler

"PAGANS AND PURITANS" a talk given by Tim Healey

From the Roman goddess Flora to the May Queen over two millennia, with side helpings of religion, 'moorish' dancing and alcohol, Tim's talk was both illuminating and generously illuminated.

The apparent simplicity of the celebration of the Rights of Spring was shown in fact to involve complexity and contradiction together with surprising connectivity over the centuries. Until the mid 18th century May time revels were always controversial even to the Chancellor of Oxford in 1250 prohibiting processions and dancing in Churches together with the display of garlands; oh the malign effect of flower power! The running duel between revellers and their adversaries reached its peak in 1644 when Parliament, following the Westminster Assembly of Divines (religious ministers, not politicians!) banned the maypole and subsequently all celebrations. The Restoration in 1660 soon saw an end to all that, with the maypole achieving the giddy status of a symbol of the monarchy. The dawning of the Romantic Era in the mid 18th century and acceptance of religious tolerance subsequently led to the greater encouragement of May celebrations with a more romantic tinge and the return of the May Queen.

Fascinating snippets of information and the busting of some myths emerged from the talk, at least to the reviewer. The first manmade maypole was recorded in 1350, but no pictures of ribbons attached to maypoles appear until 1836 and then they were initially used in a theatrical entertainment. The European vision of the festivities in the 18th century was one of licentious entertainment as pictured by Tiepolo, whereas the English vision in the 19th century was of a wholesome and idyllic nature evidenced in Holman Hunt's paintings, praised by Tennyson in his poem *The May Queen* and promoted by John Ruskin, thereby helping to shape what we know as the May Day celebrations today.

Who was aware that Morris dancing was originally courtly, and even foreign? Derived originally from "Moorish" dancing in Spain, it spread through Europe taking on its own national identity. From its inception around the end of the 17th century to sometime in the mid 18th century when only *Hymnus Ecclesiasticus* was sung, the Magdalen Tower musical session lasted 2 hours or more; a bit chilly for the singers at that time on a May morning! While alcohol, without saying, played its part in the reveries, with parish churches centuries ago providing ale for sale, even the brewers of Oxford tried to get in on the Magdalen Bridge event in the late 19th and early 20th century by dressing their horses and drays and processing during the celebrations.

Fortunately for Oxford and the county's towns and villages the May Day celebrations thrived, although Morris dancing was on the wane towards the end of the 19th century. Good fortune in the shape of William Kimber of Headington, a squeeze box player in a Morris side, enlightened the foremost English folk song/dance historian Cecil Sharpe to the Morris musical heritage, thereby ensuring its revival.

If you want to jump off Magdalen Bridge on May Day, don't even think about it! The authorities have now taken steps to prevent it and historically it was a short lived affair from the 1940s to the 1990s, with only a few souls (drunk/lunatic?) trying since. Fortunately the authorities have assisted in the popular continued Magdalen Bridge celebrations.

Enjoy the festivities when they are permitted to return, enjoy the centuries of local history.

Some Slides from Tim Healey's Talk

Pagans and Puritans

The Story of May Morning, Oxfordshire



1250: the University bans Maytime revels

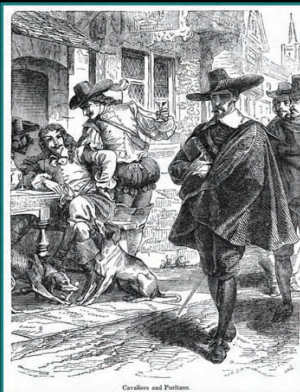
In 1250, the Chancellor of Oxford University forbade 'alike in churches, all dancing in masks or with disorderly noises, and all processions of men wearing wreaths and garlands made of leaves of trees or flowers or what not.'



Mediaeval mummers



A cheery complicity



The Puritan Backlash



Country Dances Round a Maypole
Francis Hayman, 1741

The May Queen

Randolph Caldecott 'Come Lasses and Lads', 1884



Brewery Drays, Magdalen Bridge, 1912



MAY MORNING ON MAGDALEN TOWER.



Whirly Band, steps of the Clarendon Building, 2016



MARCHAM CENTRE IN ACTION



CRICKET ON ANSON FIELD



MARCHAM CENTRE

Shirley Eccles is busy preparing the programme for 2021-22 and from September, if Covid regulations allow, we will be holding all future talks in the Main Hall at Marcham Centre (www.marchamcentre.org)

We have recently been doing trial runs to set up *'Hybrid Zoom'* so that our members can attend events in person in the Hall and enjoy meeting up with friends or alternatively view online from home.

Please remember Shirley always welcomes feed back about past speakers:
shirley.marsoc@gmail.com

MarSoc Mid-Week Walks

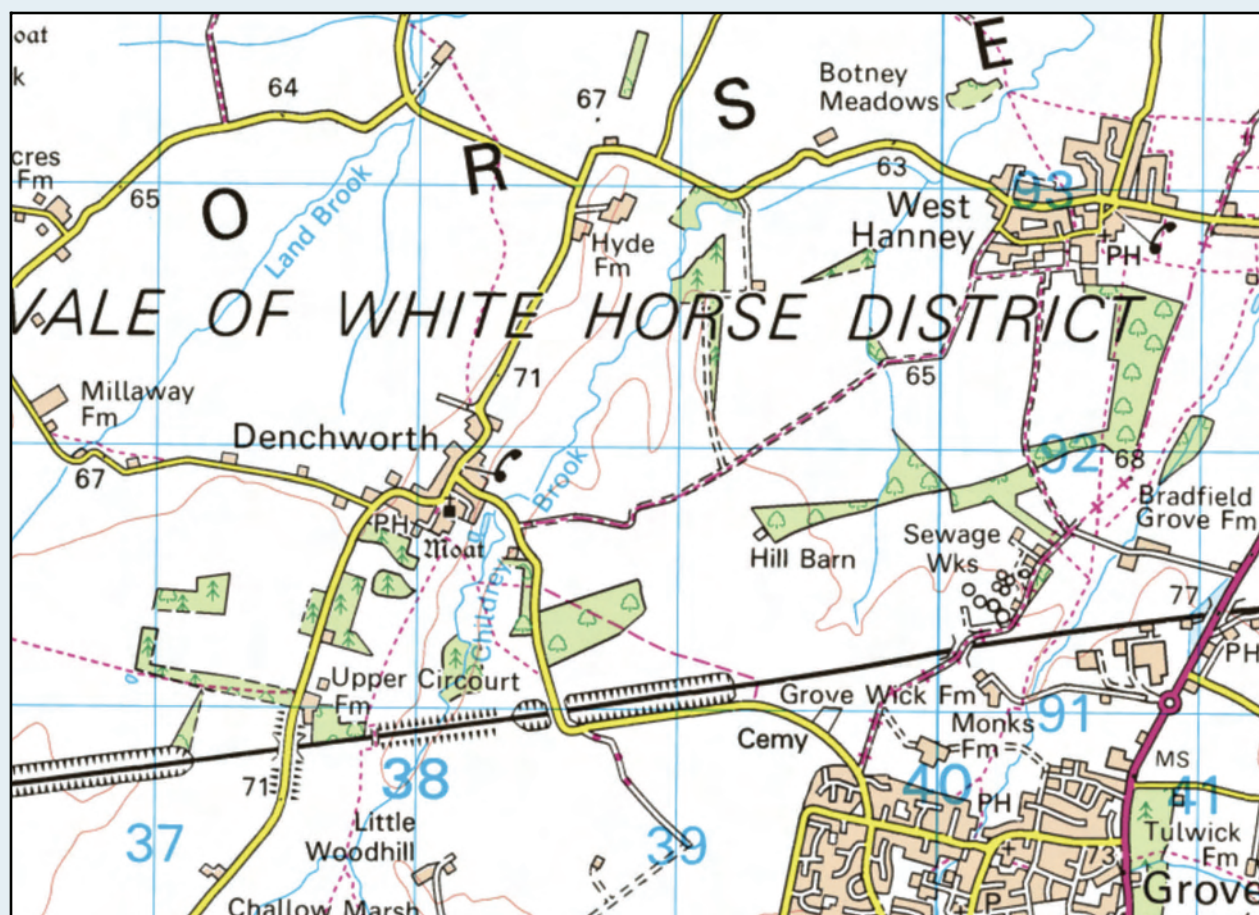
Eric and Sheila Dunford started their monthly mid-week walks again in April.

To ensure that the number of walkers complied with the Covid regulations, they organised the same outing on two Thursdays and on each occasion the enthusiastic walkers were divided into socially distanced groups of not more than six.

After a delicious lunch in the pub garden at the Fox in Denchworth, the first walk was a circuit via Grove to West Hannay and back to Denchworth. The following week the same route was taken in reverse—a walk of approximately five miles in all.

(Our thanks to Ordnance Survey for the map below!)

We will give notice of future walks that are planned in our regular emails to members and we look forward to the day when any such restrictions can be safely lifted.



PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE MID-WEEK WALKS



PICTURES - numbered from top left to bottom right

1. First Thursday's group 2. Second Thursday's group 3. The Fox at Denchworth
4. Eric leading his group 5. Denchworth Church 6. West Hanney Church

FUTURE DATES

The Marcham Society was founded with three pillars of investigation in mind:-

**local history,
archaeology
and natural history.**

In designing our programme year by year we have strived to keep those three subjects in mind. The exception has been when giving the annual lecture, where a notable villager provides a talk from their own sphere of experience or expertise.

If you have suggestions for future talks and topics for visiting speakers, please contact the Secretary,
Shirley Eccles:

shirley.marsoc@gmail.com

Dates for the Diary

Monday 24 May

Ed Peveler from Chilterns AoNB : *'Beacons of the Past, LiDAR, and woodland archaeology in South Oxfordshire'*.

Monday 28 June

Mark Davies : *The history of the Oxford Botanic Garden, founded in 1621, celebrating 400 years.*

We may be able to arrange a guided tour of the Botanic Garden following this talk if regulations allow.

Monday 26 July BBQ (if Covid regulations allow)

Reminders and Zoom links will also be sent to members by email. All these events are at 7.30 pm unless otherwise notified.

Information about the year's programme, reviews of the talks and past newsletters are also available on the society's website.

www.marchamsociety.org.uk

**[www.facebook.com/
marchamsociety](https://www.facebook.com/marchamsociety)**