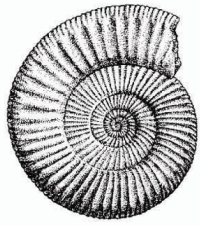


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*The*  
**Marcham**  
*Society*

# Newsletter

## ***‘THE HISTORY OF ST JOHN’S COLLEGE’***



On Monday the 25th of October Marcham Society members enjoyed a most interesting and informative talk on *‘The History of St John’s College, Oxford’* by Alastair Lack. This was the second meeting in the new Marcham Centre - 30 members were present and another 38 are able to join us on Zoom.

Alastair Lack was an undergraduate at St. Johns College Oxford, after which he went into publishing in New York, before returning to London where he worked for the BBC world service for 25 years. Upon retiring he moved to Oxford with his wife and became head of Oxford University alumni Office. For the past 16 years he has been a walking guide in Oxford.

Situated at the East End of Saint Giles near the Martyrs’ Memorial and opposite the Ashmolean Museum, St John’s which is named after John the Baptist is one of the oldest and certainly the wealthiest of the Oxford colleges.

*(continued on page 2)*

## OUR SECOND TALK IN THE MARCHAM CENTRE



*Sir Thomas White (1492-1567)*

The college was founded in 1555 by Sir Thomas White, a wealthy London merchant Taylor and entrepreneur. He was a shrewd businessman who bought the building and acquired considerable land for St. John's, not just in Oxford but in cities such as London and Bristol. He also established a number of educational foundations including Merchant Taylors' schools which have had close links with the college.

Alastair explained that most of the college buildings are organised around seven quadrangles. The 'Front Quad' remains much as Sir Thomas White left it. The 'Canterbury Quad' was the first example of Italian

Renaissance architecture in England, commissioned by Archbishop Laud and completed in 1636. The most recent quad is the 'Kendrew Quad', completed in 2010 with a new library which opened last year.

The chapel with its chequerboard floor is said to date back to the Reformation with most of the other features being added in the 19th century. In the side chapel there are five former heads of the college laid to rest. A new organ was installed in 2008.

Alastair ended his fascinating talk by mentioning just a few of the many illustrious statesmen, politicians, poets and authors that have graduated from St John's College. These include Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis, AE Houseman, Robert Graves and the former Prime Minister Tony Blair to name but a few.

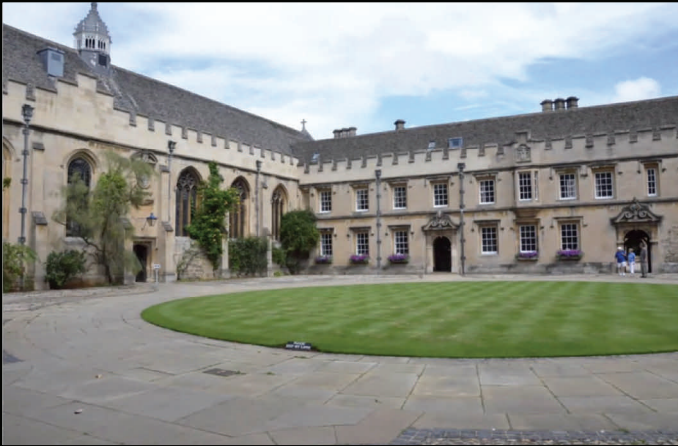
The college owns many fine buildings in St Giles including two famous pubs, The Lamb and Flag and The Eagle and Child, the latter being made famous as the meeting place of a group of Oxford literary figures known as the Inklings. These included CS Lewis and JRR Tolkien, Charles Williams and Owen Barfield.

Sadly due to the pandemic the college closed both of these establishments in 2020. However a group of Inkling fans have now taken over the lease of the Eagle and Child and plans are afoot to reopen this famous pub in the near future.

Today St John's continues to be a place of academic excellence with a vibrant and diverse community of over 600 students, half of whom are female.



**PHOTOS FROM ALASTAIR LACK'S TALK**



*The Eagle and Child,  
St Giles, Oxford*



*The Inklings*

## Mid-Week Walk: East and West Hendred, taking in the Icknield Way

### The Marcham Society walk on Thursday 21st October

*“Watch out for bustards!”* Was Eric’s advice as we set out on this walk. Fearing an ambush by local delinquents, I tightened the hold on my camera, before ascertaining that Eric was referring to the great bustard — a bird of considerable size, shot to extinction in this country in 1832, then reintroduced to Salisbury Plain in 2004 — and not to the residents of East Hendred! We learnt that certain members of this avian species, apparently tiring of rural Wiltshire, had been observed exploring the fields on the northern edge of the downs.

That’s the thing about these walks: one always learns so much. Eric and Sheila possess endless knowledge of the countryside — not only of the flora and fauna, but also of rural ways of life — and they notice things which most people would miss. On this walk, for example, we stopped to look at a couple of rickety old ladders attached to the side of a barn, speculating on their use; we observed a nearly-invisible bronze plaque, attached to the window frame of the old post office, and discovered that its display signalled to firemen in days gone by that the owners had paid for their fire cover; and I finally got to understand that the bowl-shaped fold of land, known as The Manger, beneath Whitehorse Hill, was formed by periglacial action — and, indeed, of what that particular geological phenomenon consisted.

We met up at East Hendred. Though small compared to Marcham, this village supports three pubs, two churches, a school and a museum. Eric and Sheila had arranged a special opening of this latter establishment and here we took in some of the history of this fascinating place and of the Eyston family, who have occupied Hendred House since the mid-fifteenth century.

Having fortified ourselves with an excellent pub lunch at ‘The Wheatsheaf’, we set off in the most glorious, blazing sunshine, which lasted all afternoon and which threw a spotlight on the emerging fiery autumn colours. The Wheatsheaf was notable for three things: the warm welcome from Bill and Carmel Sheehan who run it; the quality and quantity of the food (which we had all pre-selected) and for the efficiency with which this fare was served, though Eric was concerned, since no orders had been taken on the day, that he might be presented with a bill for the lot!

The walk itself, which was a little over four miles in length, took in the meandering charms of both Hendreds — which, having no thoroughfare, remain remarkably unspoilt by new development — as well as a two mile section of the old Icknield Way. This, we learnt from Eric, was once a lowland alternative to the Ridgeway. Our particular section had recently undergone considerable upgrade and now forms a high-speed route for cyclists commuting between Wantage and Harwell.

Thank you, Eric and Sheila, for organising such a marvellous day out. Pity we saw no bustards, but we did enjoy several encounters with a low flying RAF A400M transport aircraft!

*Bartle Frere*



**A FEW PHOTOS FROM THE MID-WEEK WALK**





## FUTURE DATES



### The Christmas Party in the Small Hall at the Marcham Centre

**Monday 6th December,  
6.30-10 pm**

We welcome all members to join us for a buffet meal, drinks, a quiz and some entertainment during the evening. It promises to be a jolly occasion.

A notice will be circulated at the next meeting on 22nd November asking all those who plan to attend, to sign up to bring a dish for the buffet, either savoury or sweet.

There is no fee, drinks will be free, but we do need to know numbers.

**So please let us know by email to [shirley.marsoc@gmail.com](mailto:shirley.marsoc@gmail.com) or phone 01865 391180 if you plan to attend and what you will bring to the party.**

Please know that all possible Covid safety measures will be in place just as at all our talks.

### *Dates for the Diary*

*Unless otherwise notified, future meetings will be held in the Main Hall of the Marcham Centre (7.15 for 7.45 start)*

#### **2021**

##### **Monday 22nd November :**

Richard Venables describes his role as High Sheriff of Oxfordshire

##### **Monday 6th December, 6.30-10 pm:**

*Christmas Party*

in the Small Hall at the Marcham Centre

#### **2022**

##### **Monday 24th January :**

*Annual Lecture* : James Gilbert describes his life and work as Consultant Transplant and Vascular Access Surgeon

##### **Monday 28th February :**

“The Watlington Hoard”

by James Mather

##### **Monday 28th March :**

“The Lost Villages of Oxfordshire”

by Dr Muriel Pilkington

##### **Monday 25th April :**

Members’ Evening - speakers to be announced

##### **Monday 23rd May :**

“High Society Scandals in Oxfordshire”

by Julie Ann Godson

##### **Monday 27th June :**

“The History of Kingston Baguize House”

by Virginia Grant

##### **Saturday 16th July :**

*Summer BBQ*