

# FULBOURN VILLAGE HISTORY SOCIETY

"To save Fulbourn's past for the future"

NEWSLETTER NO. 24

SUMMER 2006

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## FVHS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM will be held this year at the Fulbourn Centre on Thursday, 17th May 2007, 7.15 pm for 7.30 pm

Along with the normal business, there will be a selection of artefacts on display belonging to Fulbourn Village History Society which are mainly related to Fulbourn people and social history.

There will also be an informal competition arranged to identify these 'mystery' objects and even a prize for the fortunate winner so come along to test your expertise (or luck!) and join in the fun. Please do arrange to attend this important meeting but even should you be prevented from attending, it would be appreciated if you complete the nomination slips, enclosed for those receiving paper copies or as a downloadable rtf attachment for those 'doing their bit for the planet!' Completed slips should be sent to Clinton Tweed at the address indicated on the form by 16th May, 2007.

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### ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE GRAND ARCADE - by Glynis Arber

On Saturday, 17 March I attended an event 'From the Rooftops Down' joint hosted by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit and John Lewis. It aimed to tie together elements of Cambridge past, present and future within the context of the Grand Arcade and the old Robert Sayle shop that used to be on St Andrew's Street.

The archaeological work covered more than 1 hectare of Cambridge City Centre, involved up to 30 archaeologists on site and lasted for 12 months. On display at the exhibition were many of the artefacts unearthed during the extensive excavations, and while not yet completed, already 110,000 finds weighing 3100kg+ (including 42000 pottery pieces) have been processed.

Amongst them are clay pipes, glass bottles, crockery (some with their owners names depicted), iron keys, spurs and horse shoes. A rare turned 13C-14C wooden jug, of European maple, parts of a medieval wooden chest and a leather tankard from

the 16C have also been identified. Perhaps the most bizarre discovery was a pit in which six cows had been buried, including one that was pregnant. This dates to the 16C and results from a detailed analysis are still awaited to explain why the animals were not butchered and eaten.

A short film depicting life at Robert Sayle was shown, with commentary from the audio recollections of retired partners. I certainly experienced considerable nostalgia at once more seeing those wonderful long, polished, wooden counters and lovely curving staircase (the latter, apparently, will be incorporated into the new building) - not to mention reliving the nerve-racking experience of shopping with my mother amongst the fragile (and expensive) products inside 'Barratts' China Shop!!

I am assured that 'John Lewis' is opening its doors in the Autumn of 2007 (before the Grand Arcade is completed), that it is three times larger than before

and will be the biggest department store in East Anglia - shopaholics, rejoice!

This is just a 'taster' of what Fulbourn Village History Society members can expect to hear from the speaker at our first meeting in October, when Alison Dickens, the archaeologist in charge of excavations at the Grand Arcade, will bring us up to date on developments. Personally, I can't wait!

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## FEBRUARY MEETING REVIEW

### Fom the Secretary

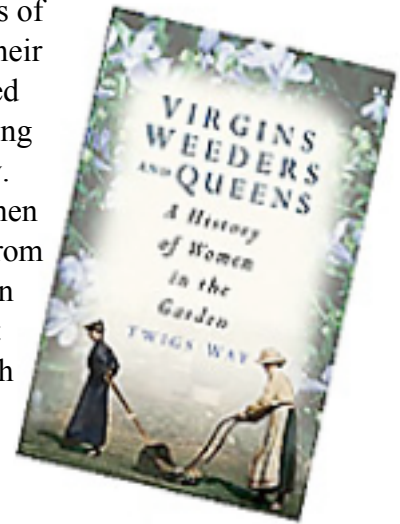
At our February meeting, members were entertained by the intriguingly entitled powerpoint presentation, 'Virgins, Weeders and Queens'. It was given by experienced speaker and garden historian Twigs Way, and was based on her recently published book of the same name.

It became evident that attitudes to women's relationship with the garden was a fascinating indication (insight?) of social mores of the time. Starting with the bad press women received as a result of the unfortunate incident involving Eve and the apple, we discovered that (chaste) noble women of the medieval period were associated with the Virgin Mary in the setting of an enclosed garden. Illuminated manuscripts depicted this seclusion and the theme re-emerged much later, in pictures of upper class Victorian/Edwardian women portrayed as if they were confined to the conservatory.

There were though, certain situations that allowed women to participate in horticulture, rather than just look decorative. In particular, the medieval and early modern housewife, had a duty to manage the kitchen and herb garden. Although dangerous, since the charge of witchcraft was ever present, growing, obtaining and supplying herbs for medicinal purposes also provided peasant women with an income. This ended when the Renaissance brought with it an increased knowledge of science, anatomy etc, eventually leading to the 'educated' male doctors dominance in any aspect relating to the medical profession.

Ladies could become involved in botany, their careful observations being especially relevant to the genteel pastime of painting water colours of flowers. But the introduction in the eighteenth

century, of the Linnean system whereby the reproductive organs of plants assisted in their classification, turned botany into anything but a 'polite' study. Subsequently, women were discouraged from taking an interest in an exotic (or is that erotic) species such as orchids, and were restricted to the sexless fern!



The development of landscaped gardens during the 1700's, gave aristocratic ladies who spent much of their time on country estates (on occasion as banishment for scandalous love affairs), the opportunity to design gardens. At the very least, they were often responsible for facilitating the practical implementation of work by men like Capability Brown. By the end of the nineteenth century exceptional women, for instance the intrepid Victorian artist traveller Marianne North (many of whose discoveries were named after her), had proved they were as good as men in finding and identifying new species.

Indeed, as women grew more empowered by the suffrage movement, several 'schools' for women gardeners and garden designers, were founded. Corsets were swapped for tweed bloomers and the graduates of such establishments, drawn from daughters of the professional class, were destined to become Head Gardeners in their own right. Admittedly, this did not occur until a lack of man power gave such women their chance to fill vacancies caused by men leaving to fight in World War I.

While the immense contribution women made on the land during the Second World War was acknowledged, time did not allow this to be explored in detail. However, it is the subject of Twigs Way's next book, and hopefully, a return visit which we certainly await with great anticipation.

## Secretary's March Meeting Review 'DRUGS IN THE FENS'

At our March meeting social historian Brian Jones gave a talk which centred around drugs grown in fenland for consumption by the local population during the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries. He effectively used old newspaper reports and contemporary accounts to bring to life the story of a people whose way of life involved daily exposure to the opium poppy. Indeed, nineteenth century Ely was described by many as 'The Opium Eating City' where 'the sale of laudanum was as common as butter or cheese'. The dire consequence on one Ely citizen were evocatively, if luridly, described by a mid-nineteenth century article in the Morning Chronicle *"The exhilarating effect of her last dose had passed off and had give place to that wretched lowness of spirit in which the life of an opium taker alternates. As the repulsive looking hag sat upright in a filthy bed in a chimney corner, her uncouth and cadaverous features streaked by the various courses her tears had taken in her last interval of despondency with her tangled grey hair hanging over her shoulders, her sunken neck and withered arms were exposed to view as she rolled up another pill of the filthy looking drug and raise it trembling to her discoloured lips, presented a spectacle more loathsome than imagination could conceive."*

To a fascinated audience, Brian Jones showed how the social condition of the fenman made opium taking attractive, since it eased hunger and the 'ague' or fever that was endemic to the fen region. Indeed, it's frequent use may well have explained observers comments about 'feeble minded idiotic people one frequently met in the Fens"! The most popular method of obtaining the drug was to infuse a brew of 'Poppy-Head' tea or chew a pill/tablet made up by a chemist using a paste derived from opium. It was also added to beer brewed in the area – the results of which could be very disconcerting to strangers!

Adults were not the only consumers of the drug, however, because the gang system of labour operating in the Fens meant women were

frequently away from home for a whole day. It was therefore particularly popular with child minders who no doubt found that caring for a large number of children was easier if the infants were sedated before being placed inside a 'copper' for safety. Indeed, there were proprietary brands such as 'Godfrey's Cordial' and 'Penny Sticks', sold specifically as soothers for babies, both of which contained the narcotic opium. Unfortunately, consequences could be tragic, and many coroner reports testify to the accidental overdose of infants from such products.



It appeared the opium poppy was introduced to the fens around the late eighteenth century, where it flourished due to the fertile conditions of the soil following recent drainage programmes. However, the crop was never commercialised, and was grown for local use – the 'opium dens' found in London and other urban conurbations relied on opium with stronger potency imported from the Far East. Gradually, increased drug regulation and economic factors, brought about the decline of opium cultivation in the fens. Yet statistics relating to the mid nineteenth century have been calculated and indicate how important the crop had been: In 1859 at least 30,000 lb of Opium was consumed in the Fens, one druggist in Ely sold three hundredweight a year, and two others averaged over 3/4 of a hundredweight each. It certainly puts the drug and alcohol abuse of our own day into perspective!

# FROM THE ARCHIVES

by Mrs. Pat White

## Stephen de Fulbourn

Information from the archives re Waterford, in Ireland, from Joy Meyer who found a street named "Fulbourn Street" near Reginald's Tower in Waterford.

It appears that the Lower Undercroft of the Tower was built by Stephen de Fulbourn, Bishop of Waterford and Governor of Ireland in the 13th century. In 1294, his brother, Walter de Fulbourn, was both Bishop of Waterford and Treasurer of Ireland. Stephen established a mint in Waterford in 1281 under Edward I.

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# RENEWAL REMINDER

For those not enjoying senior citizen/life membership of the Fulbourn Institute Sports and Social Club, I would advise that your membership renewal fell due on 1st April 2007. Renewal forms/facilities are available from the bar at the Fulbourn Centre, who will be pleased to see you.

## SUMMER OUTING



Our summer trip this year is an outing by coach to HATFIELD HOUSE., on Saturday, 14th July. Departures will be at 9.30 am from the Six Bells and Bakers Arms houses of refreshment returning at approx. 6.00 pm. For those who have paid deposits, the balance of £11.50 is due by our meeting at Fulbourn Centre on April 19th and there are still a few places available at £16.50 per head. Contact Gill Bradford on 01223 880783, as early as possible is suggested.

## FVHS RECEIVES AWARD

As we go to print we receive the news that the report published last year "In Search of Fulbourn" has been selected from a total of 44 candidates to receive an award for "Top Ten Book Award finalists" presented by the Cambridgeshire Association for Local History. The award, a framed certificate, will be presented at the King's School, Ely on Saturday 19th May and further news will follow in our next issue. Meantime further details can be obtained from the CALH website <<http://www.calh.org.uk>>

## COFFEE MORNING

Do not forget our coffee morning/bring and buy sale with raffle on Saturday 28th July from 10 - 12 pm at the Manor House. This popular event is a sociable get together plus a useful fundraiser for the Society so enter it in your diaries now and support this fun event... in fact why not bring a friend?

**Last call for copy for the next edition. Please let Linda Halton or Glynis Arber have your contributions in good time.....!!**