

I'm getting to feel a bit like the proverbial 'pin cushion', having just had my flu jab. However, the 5 COVID 19 ones seemed to do the trick as, having brought back a dose of C19 from Paris, it just passed off like a mild cold. Let's hope the flu jab is as efficacious for all of us.

Our last meeting on Friday 28th October was a great success, with getting on for almost 100 members and guests enjoying each other's company, the talk and the great salad supper – not to mention the bar!

The talk was on Swan Marking, given by David Barber, MVO, Swan Marker to His Majesty the King, who has held the job for almost 30 years. Swan marks in England were a variety of unique identifying notches made on the beaks of swans living and foraging at large on rivers and elsewhere, in order to identify their official "owner" or keeper. Swans are royal birds, the property of the monarch, but ownership of flocks could be granted by royal deed to certain individuals, whose birds' beaks would then be marked with the appointed swan mark.

The marks were designed and granted by signed and sealed deed by the "Master of his/her Majesty's Royal Game of all manner of swans and cygnets" for the county concerned. All unmarked swans on English rivers continue to be the property of the monarch, and the royal office of Marker of the Swans, which in some form or other can be traced back to the 14th century, still survives.

Apart from Swan Upping, The King's Swan Marker has other duties. He advises organisations throughout the country about swan welfare and incidents involving swans, he monitors the health of local swan populations and advises fishing and boating organisations how to work with wildlife. The King's Swan Marker works closely with swan rescue organisations and supervises the rescue of sick and injured swans.

Also, he co-ordinates the removal of swans from stretches of the River Thames used for summer rowing regattas. David Barber's passion for the job came across most vividly when he talked about using the post to further educate our young children on the need for wildlife conservation to become a natural part of their lives.

Now some more good news! Benson Parish Council, after more than 30 year of asking, agreed unanimously (with one councillor recusing themselves as having an interest) on Thursday 27th October to, in principal, house the Village History Archive. The matter was referred back to the Halls Committee to work out the details of precise location, contract and indemnity.

In the meantime, the Society's History Group will be working hard at reducing the size of the physical Archive by a process of triage and digitisation. To aid them in this process they are contacting other local archives and the Oxford History Centre in an attempt to get some practical guidance on cataloguing and retention. However, there is a limit to what they can do until the various components of the Archive are together in one place.

I hope you will all join me in thanking the Council for making this unanimous decision and, in particular, the Parish Clerk, Nicky Copland, and Teresa McTeague, Head of Halls, for their time and guidance. For local families and local and national researchers this is a major step forward. We are not yet at the destination but we are now, at least, on the right road.

Our next Friday meeting is on December 2nd and as it is our 'Christmas' meeting it will start with the usual mulled wine. The Talk will be 'Christmas Customs', given by Mark Lewis, and it will be followed by a turkey salad with the turkey being cooked and carved by our local butcher (and chef) Steve Alborough and the salads provided by volunteer members. This will be followed by a plate of complimentary mince pies for each table. In addition, there will be our usual splendid Christmas raffle, organised by Barbara Verdon.

So why not start Christmas early and come and join us – guests are charged £5 for entrance and all participants pay £5 for the supper. The mulled wine (ably made by Johnny Johnson from his secret recipe) and mince pies are free and there will be the usual bar, run by 'Mine Hosts' Sue and David Cooper.

Hope to see you then, David McGill.