

 **BENSON BULLETIN REPORT – JUN 2023**

The attendance at our May meeting was tremendous and caught us out with the provision of suppers. So let me apologise to those members who had an inadequate supper. Not knowing how many members will attend each month is obviously a problem but we do try for and usually have a surplus. Hopefully the action we have now taken will ensure a shortage does not happen again.

Food was also the subject of the talk, given by Liz Woolley on ‘Beer, Sausages and Marmalade’ about Oxfordshire food and drink in the 19th century. Now I know not everyone likes beer but sausages and marmalade I would have thought were universally enjoyed and so it proved, judging by the questions Liz fielded at the end of her talk.

I guess we all know about Frank Cooper’s Oxford Marmalade but probably have never given any thought to how it originated or when. The name comes from the Portuguese/Spanish word for ‘jam’ and one of the earliest recipes dates from the late 17th century. Even as far back as Roman times (and probably long before) they were preserving fruit by boiling it but it was usually a mix of quince and citrus and was nearer what is known as Membrillo or quince paste. However, Frank Cooper’s wife Sarah-Jane did not make her first batch of 75 lbs, to her own recipe, to be sold in their grocery shops in Oxford until 1874…….…and the rest is gastronomic history.

As an aside, who was the most famous Frank Cooper? Answer at the end of this piece.

Moving on, I for one did not know about the Oxford Sausage, made from both pork and veal and seasoned with lemon and herbs. Reference can be found to it in the early 18th century but its inclusion in Mrs Beeton’s Book of Household Management, published in 1861, meant that it soon reached a much wider audience. Personally, I will be tracking down a source – sounds yummee!

As an early member of the SPBW (Society for the Preservation of Beers from the Wood) I found very interesting Liz’s story about Beer. At one time you could not walk down a street in Oxford and not come across a brewery. Largely because of the lack of a reliable supply of potable water, everyone drank ‘small beer’ (about 2.8% ABV) – even the colleges had their own breweries. Several of the larger ones were clustered between the station and the castle. This was *Oxford’s Brewing Quarter* and its industry lasted right up until 1998 with names like Halls, Hanleys, Hook Norton, Morrells, Swan and many more.

### For those interested in learning more search ‘A magical history tour of beer and brewing in Oxford’.

### By the time you read this our May meeting will have already taken place and instead of a talk we had a quiz, with questions largely based on Benson and its surrounding area. We now take a break for the summer months, reconvening on the 29th September, when the talk will be ‘Thames Bridges - Abingdon to Goring ad Streetley’.

### In the meantime, the Management Committee will still be meeting to deal with various subjects that impinge on our functioning and will communicate items thought to be of interest to the membership, in the usual way.

### So, here’s wishing you all a happy summer.

### David McGill

Answer: Frank ‘Gary’ Cooper of Hollywood fame.