

BENSON BULLETING REPORT – JUNE 2022

I wonder for how many of us, new and old residents, the river played a significant part in choosing to live here. I'm sure there are other more significant reasons like size of affordable house, communication links, the proximity of shops and schools. However, surveys have shown that rivers are high up on the list of local attractions and not just for boat owners. Around Benson 'the river' is the Thames (or maybe in Dorchester, the Thame) and it has played its part in village life for centuries. Just how much was highlighted in the May Zoom talk to the Society by Dr. Simon Wenham.

Simon took us along a fascinating journey of 'Pleasure Boating on the Thames' – how it developed and how it traded off and interacted with the river's commercial use, copiously illustrated with pictures of all sorts of river craft from punts to 3 decker pleasure steamers. The Victorian era seemed to be the apex of river travel and his photographs showing the extraordinary number of people and boats at Boulter's Lock at holiday times were almost unbelievable – they certainly weren't socially distanced! A really well put together and interesting talk.

While on the subject of the river, John Dalton (a member of the Society for decades), has just authored and published a wonderfully illustrated book called "boats, locks and bridges", which is a look back at life on the upper Thames as seen from Wallingford and Benson. It should be available from Derry's Den and Wallingford Bookshop by the time you read this.

On Friday the 28 th May our Zoom talk will be given by Mark Lewis - "Sentinels of the Sea, the Amazing History of Lighthouses" – enlightening us on 'Pharology', the study of lighthouses and other navigational aids. The talk will illuminate the evolving history of lighthouse construction, from the Pharos of Alexandria to the present day, along with the lives of the keepers, including some extraordinary heroic stories associated with them. As is our usual practice there will not be any talks

in June, July or August. (No apologies for the puns – just couldn't resist!) According to the PM's "Road Map" it will probably be September before we can get together on a Friday for our usual social and supper evening and so let's hope the PC will have sorted out what the new hiring rules will be by then and that they're not too restrictive. If they have and they're not, Friday 24 th September will be 'Party Night' - what form it will take will have to wait until nearer the time. So, if you know anyone who is thinking of joining our happy band make sure they contact John Tchighianoff and take advantage of the reduced membership fee for the autumn session, so they can join us at the party.

Finally, thankfully, the incidence of Covid-19 in our area seems to be minimal but that does not mean it's non-existent – so stay safe!

David McGill