

BENSON BULLETIN REPORT – NOV 2019

*There will be a rusty gun on the wall, sweetheart,
The rife grooves curling with fakes of rust.
A spider will make a silver string nest
in the darkest, warmest corner of it.*

There are plenty of spider spun silver threads about the place. I walk into them in alleys about the village; they're shimmering on the field gates drizzled with morning's dew; or threaded about the stiles I climb over with the dogs; or hanging about the house, a sly slight on my aging eyesight. This is the spider's time of year – their webs and threads trim Halloween's pranks.

Dogs, by the way, is not a typo: there is another canine resident in the former Free Church. He's Finn. Although the same breed, Finn could not be more different from Milo; and Milo could not be more indifferent to Finn. It is but a work-in-progress although at times progress feels unbearably slow.

Celebrating slowing progress is in one sense what the life and work of William Morris, illustrious poet, artist and social reformer was all about. Morris pioneered a movement that reacted against the soulless machine production of the Industrial Revolution and attempted to promote joyful labour, the enjoyment of fine craftsmanship and simplicity of expression in arts, crafts and design. William Morris was the subject of the talk by Mark Lewis in the society's October meeting.

By way of contrast in September Dr Caroline Bowden spoke about the English Convents in Europe and some of their connections to Thames Valley families – surprisingly including that of Alexander Pope, perhaps the greatest essayist of the eighteenth century, who was part of the Englefield family long based in Reading and therefore part of the Catholic gentry from the reign of Mary Tudor. The final meeting of 2019 will take place on Friday 13th December and will include a singalong and a Flannigan and Allan tribute from James Mitchel and Oliver Williams. The Society's monthly meetings include not only a talk and an update on what is going on in the village, but also a great value supper for £5 per head and a licensed bar. For those new to the village it is a great way to dip your toe into village life and meet new people and make new friends. There is a welcome table at every meeting, and all are assured of the warmest welcome from the Society. Membership currently stands at £10.00 for a full year. The membership year runs from January to December. A society membership might even make a good present at Christmas for a friend or family member. Please check out the Web Page to find out more: www.bensingtonsociety.com.

November will see the beginning of usual preparations for the society AGM of which I will write more next month. Please note, however, that the AGM itself will take place at the February 2020 meeting. There is always a continued need for new members to serve on the committee or in other capacities. If you can help, please speak with David McGill or any of the committee.

November always feels a solemn time: its moody moons shrouded with their creamy clouds; its leaden skies dressed as mourning lights; and the votive hopes of the starry heavens made visible in the frosty nights. On the edge of winter our season of remembrance has come around again. We do remember. We do not dare forget for we owe too much to the ever young who laid aside their youth and their hopes for our sakes without even knowing us. Our care is reflected in the continuing care shown to the village War Memorial and by the dignified solemnity with which we observe Remembrance Sunday in Benson and villages hereabouts.

Last year we kept the centennial of the end of the Great War. It was not the war to end all wars and as we recall this year there was in fact only a gap of twenty years before the world found itself once more at war. The Second World War owns many causes, but one at least has its centennial this year for in November 1919 the US Senate refused to ratify the Versailles Treaty and as a consequence the USA never joined the League of Nations.

*The trigger and the range-finder, they too will be rusty.
And no hands will polish the gun,
and it will hang on the wall.
Forefingers and thumbs will point casually toward it.
It will be spoken among half-forgotten,
whished-to-be-forgotten things.
They will tell the spider:
Go on, you're doing good work.*

(A.E.F – Carl Sandburg)

The rusting guns evoked widely held hopes that a lasting peace might come from the terrible losses of war. Those hopes were already bitterly disappointed by November 1919. John Murphy