

*Only reapers, reaping early
 In among the bearded barley,
 Hear a song that echoes cheerly
 From the river winding clearly,
 Down to tower'd Camelot:
 And by the moon the reaper weary,
 Piling sheaves in uplands airy,
 Listening, whispers "'Tis the fairy
 Lady of Shalott."*
(Alfred, Lord Tennyson)

At this time of year as I walk the fields around the village, Milo happily in tow - off his lead, bouncing ahead on the rubber-legs of youth with me hobbling along behind – perhaps by the open meadows along the river with their daisies lazily bobbing in the breeze or by statuesque cowslips clustered in stand-offish clumps or across carpets of brilliant buttercups, effortlessly reflecting the golden sun; bees and butterflies, dragonflies and midges fluttering and hovering over them; perhaps in another field I'll eye lugubrious brown cows cautiously munching and warily world-watching and flicking flies aside with their tails; and in another in I'll see green wheat ripen to golden corn basking dreamily in the sun; and wherever I walk there is the symphony of full-throated birdsong, each virtuoso in a gregarious competition and just for a second it feels quite possible that I might come across one of those medieval reapers who heard the eerie song of the Lady of Shalott....

When Toni Mount speaks to the Society on the subject of **the "Medieval Housewife"** on May's last day we will have a chance to learn something more of the day to day reality of life in the Middle Ages than the glorious idylls spun into poetry by Tennyson. The following day Toni also speaks at Benson Library at 2.00pm as part of the Crime Month about her latest Sebastian Foxley novel, **The Colour of Lies**. Toni's talk brings to close the first half of the society's year.

The Society meetings will recommence in September with a talk from Dr Caroline Bowden: **"Thames Valley Recusants and the Convent at Bruges"**. Many of you well know our local area had a very strong continuing Catholic life after the Reformation. On 25th October Mark Lewis will address the society on **William Morris and the Arts and Craft movement**.

All the society meetings take place in the Village Hall. There is a licensed bar and a wonderful supper for £5.00. It is hoped that newcomers to Benson will come to one of these meetings. They're sure to receive a warm welcome and if you are new to the society be sure to come to the *Welcome Table* where our Chair David McGill will be there to greet you.

In April, Chris Hearn from Loddon Brewery gave a fascinating, entertaining and informative talk on how the brewery came to be and how the beers are made. Chris brought hops and barley for us to smell and his passion for what they do captivated everyone. As a consequence of there are plans a-foot to make a visit to Loddon Brewery one of our future outings.

Meanwhile, the first of this year's outings is due to take place to Polesden Lacey on 23rd May and will be followed in June with a visit to the **Weald and Downland Living Museum** near Chichester. Finally, before our first meeting of Autumn there will be a visit to **Battle of Britain Bunker** in Hillingdon. The last outing of the year will take place on 14th October to the **Post Office Museum and Railway in London**.

With Summer about to arrive doing things in the outdoors – weather -permitting – is always special. As well as the outings, you can find the Bensington Society Web Page www.bensington-society.com links to various local groups to which the Society is affiliated. Wallingford Museum for example has walking tours in the summer months and on a rainy afternoon the museum itself is a must – especially for those interested in all things Agatha Christie who lived in Winterbrook and is buried in St Mary's Church Cholsey. Fans still make their pilgrimage there to put flowers on her grave.

There are many paths for pilgrims of all kinds to take about the village – from those originally taken in the dead of night from safe house to safe houses by Catholic Priests – like Priest's Moor Lane in Warborough or Papist Way in Cholsey. There are even more ancient paths for us twenty-first-century walkers with our dogs to follow not least the Ridgeway which I've now walked as far as Lewknor and under the M40. Nearer by - crossing the Thames at Benson - affords one of the best views at this time of year - as the wide river sweeps up to Shillingford and down to Wallingford with the riverbanks fully clad in their leafy shawls, with the swans and moorhens and ducks taking the slow lane where reeds provide some cover, whilst rowers racing or bargemen in their skiffs or pleasure-seekers in their river boats pass on towards the remnant ruins of Wallingford Castle.....

*By the margin, willow-veil'd
 Slide the heavy barges trail'd
 By slow horses; and unhail'd
 The shallop flitteth silken-sail'd
 Skimming down to Camelot:*