

*O hushed October morning mild,
Thy leaves have ripened to the fall;
Release one leaf at break of day;
At noon release another leaf;
One from our trees, one far away.
Retard the sun with gentle mist;
Enchant the land with amethyst.*

The metaphor of falling leaves could not be more apt as it is with great sadness that I report the sudden death of the Society's Treasurer, Tony Holder. Tony was a well-loved member of our society and the wider village community which was eloquently testified to by the fact that St Helen's church was packed to overflowing for his funeral service on 6th September. On behalf of the entire society I extend condolences to Brenda and to all Tony's family and to his many friends.

Autumn's mists have already graced many mornings here in Benson. From this point onward walks with Milo will be accompanied by the seasonal timpani of crackling leaves. The blackberries are already passing, and apples have fallen to a noble rot although along the shady alleys of the village I've espied black grapes – small enough to dry to currants and juicy enough to make jelly. I've opted for the latter.

Out in the countryside, the trees' leafy canopies are being daily drained of their green by strong sunshine. Now, the hay is stacked; and the fields are left but standing stubble. The air owns a sudden chill. On cue summer takes her final bow as days shorten and autumn dresses the byways and footpaths with a rustling taffeta of leaves. Everywhere I walk I notice a scattering of spiky husks that indicates the busy squirrels are having their fill of the sweet horse-chestnuts.

We too are expecting some sweet savour from September's glut as Dr Caroline Bowden talks to the Society on the subject of the Thames Valley Recusant Families and the English Convents 1600-1800. Caroline's research into the English Convents on the Continent is widely regarded and her talk is to include original research carried out over the summer. The aspect of women's history has long been neglected. The English Convents were more than refuges for Catholic vocations; the Nuns were sponsors of education and patrons of the arts, and of course like all communities they had their secrets and scandals.

This month's talk by Mark Lewis will be on William Morris and the Arts and Craft movement and the society will be welcoming newcomers to the villages to the Society. We hope you will take the opportunity to join us. These evenings include not only the talk. There is a licensed bar and a salad supper is available for £5.00 per head. There is also an opportunity to raise matters of wider interest in the village. Up to date information can be found on www.bensington-society.com where there are a number of links to other local organisations including the History Society.

It must be safe to mention Christmas as I've already seen tins of Quality Street on sale, so please remember to put the date of the Society's Christmas meeting in your dairies: it is 13th December this year and will include "Two Men and a Piano" giving their Flannagan and Allen Tribute Act together with a singalong. If you are looking for the odd stocking flier don't forget there are various books on the Village's history available either via the Web Page or from Derry's Den.

As well as the percussive leaves my autumn walks with Milo will acquire another character. By the time I next write I will have a puppy – another American cocker spaniel - and Milo will have acquired a playmate at whom he can bark orders. Milo will not welcome change. As we all do, at first he will sulk, passively resisting this change in his world, but in his own time he will come, as we all must come, to embrace the changes time imposes on our own small worlds. This coming October for me will therefore own a new character all its own - literally - and of course metaphorically.

*O hushed October morning mild,
Begin the hours of this day slow.
Make the day seem to us less brief.
Hearts not averse to being beguiled,
Beguile us in the way you know. (Robert Frost)*

John Murphy