**THE BENSINGTON SOCIETY – MARCH 2020**

For Winter came: the wind was his whip:

One choppy finger was on his lip:

He had torn the cataracts from the hills

And they clanked at his girdle like manacles;

His breath was a chain which without a sound

The earth, and the air, and the water bound;

He came, fiercely driven, in his chariot-throne

By the tenfold blasts of the Arctic zone. (Percy Bysshe Shelley)

March is the month traditionally associated with wild weather which is probably why the Anglo-Saxons called it Hlyd monath - Stormy month. But the storms came early. The whipping winds of Storm Ciara took down trees in Dorchester, one of which fell across the bridge and closed the road into the village. Benson had a lucky escape – although many experienced power outages.

March was also the first month of the Roman Calendar and named for the favourite deity of the martial Romans – Mars. Our financial year still reflects that past when Britain was part of Rome’s Empire. Until the 1750s, Lady Day was the frst day of the New Year. It remains a quarter day when rents often fall due. From this year, the society’s year will also effectively begin each March as its AGM takes place at the end of February and a new committee will then be in place each March.

The January meeting was graced both by Karl Bird who spoke amusingly about Misadventures in the Movies and also with the John Coggins models of the village from the 1930’s: one which shows High Street from the Crown Inn pub and Crown Lane; one is of the coal yard on the A407, where the Waterfront café now is; and one is Jasmine Cottage, in Old London Road, which was John’s home. There is now an endeavour to keep these in the public space in the village.

I will report on the February talk by Nicholas Brazil on the subject of the Literary Footprints in the Thames Valley next month. In March Prof. Tony Claydon, who has only recently published on the subject of the Glorious Revolution and its aftermath, will speak on William III and the Making of Modern World. In April, just after Easter, Timothy Walker will speak on “Harcourt Arboretum and Oxford Botanic Gardens” and the frst half of the year will close in May with a talk by Hugh Granger on “Interactive slang, Euphemisms & Acronyms.” The first outing of the year takes place on 7th May – just before this year’s frst May Bank holiday on 8th May and is to Baddesley Clinton & Packwood House. Full details of talks and outings can be found on the Society Web Page: www.bensington-society.com/ where there is a wealth of information and links to the History Group and other society affiliates.

The Society meets monthly usually on the last Friday of the month and as well as a talk, the evenings include a licensed bar and a supper for £5 per head. Visitors are always very welcome and there is a welcome table for those new to the society or to the village. It gives newcomers an opportunity to meet new people and make new friends. The monthly meetings also offer an opportunity to raise matters of local concern and offer an opportunity to keep abreast of planning and other developments that affect the village which is our home and thereby enabling us all to nurture our community of shared interest.

Winter has been wetter this year and I’ve been bogged down literally rather than metaphorically. The dogs don’t much like the rain or howling wind, although we have been out on the Ridgeway with them - in between the cloud bursts. The rolling down above Ewelme afford a view that includes the ancient Clumps our forefathers fortified but no longer the defining brutalist modernity of the Didcot Power Station. Now, however, I already see the changes come. The moon sits high on clear nights and paints the village with its creamy sateen sheen.

Now the dawn comes early over Old London Road and when I walk Milo and Finn out, the village edge is girdled with a clash of red and pink and orange and aquamarine haphazardly drawn above the charcoal Chilterns. It is surely impossible not to be glad to be alive at such a dawning, despite what often now seems to be the dull meanness of the times in which we live. And as Shelley promises, bluebells and lily of the valley will soon be back and all in the world will be well.

Then the pied wind-flowers and the tulip tall,

And narcissi, the fairest among them all,

Who gaze on their eyes in the stream’s recess,

Till they die of their own dear loveliness;

And the Naiad-like lily of the vale,

Whom youth makes so fair and passion so pale

That the light of its tremulous bells is seen

Through their pavilions of tender green John Murphy