**BENSINGTON SOCIETY – APRIL 2020**

It pelted, pelted all day long,

A-singing at its work,

Till every heart took up the song

Way out to Back-O'Bourke.

And every creek a banker ran,

And dams filled overtop;

"We'll all be roomed," said Hanrahan,

 "If this rain doesn't stop." (Said Hanrahan: John O’Brien)

When I was satchel small, whenever there was dark talk over the dinner table of storms, or droughts or foods or some such, my mum would always chip in: We'll all be rooned," said Hanrahan,, Before the year is out.". As we have weathered much these last few months from unseasonal storms and foods to pandemics, Hanrahan’s pessimistic descant to life’s troubles seldom has rung more true.

Many of the ancient fields about the village are water-logged and crops like winter-wheat are lost not just hereabouts but across the country. The dogs hate it and so do I. I feel that I have not been able to do justice to the gloriously lengthening days that have come and on the occasion when the sky is blue and the sun shines, by the time I’m ready to go out – the wind is up again and the rain resumes. If I persist, I quickly find walking any distance from the village is a quagmire of slippery challenges or even when the wind is at your back, its bitter chill packs a powerful punch.

Perhaps I should embrace it as an observed Lenten abstinence – but it is not an abstinence that makes my heart grow fonder. For centuries the bread and butter of poets, composers, playwrights, authors - and even pizzas – has rested on the reliability of our four seasons. Climate change has blown hot and cold on many old certainties and we now appear only to have two seasons wet and dry. There’s little literary Romance in either. Nick Brazil’s “Artistic & Literary Footprints in the Thames Valley” reminded us of a golden age when seasons knew their time and spring and summer were just for messing about on the river. Retracing the footsteps of luminaries such as Henry James; Kenneth Graham; Alexander Pope and many more, Nick gently rowed downstream from Mapledurham to Aldworth. He drew attention to a number of local sites worth a visit, including St Peter & Paul Checkendon; the medieval Barn at Goosecroft, Purely, where there is a monthly Farmers’ Market; and the De La Beche effigies at the church in Aldworth itself. You can find Nick Brazil’s full Reference Sheet to all the places of interest on the Society Webpage.

Nick’s talk followed the Society AGM. A new committee was elected and remains substantially the same as last year’s save for the notable addition of Richard Peters as Treasurer. There were some amendments to the Society constitution.

**The current Corona Virus Covid-19 pandemic**

Given the rapidly changing situation and the gathering certainty of restrictions being imposed on public gatherings, the Committee has taken the difficult decision to suspend all the meetings of the Bensington Society until September. Any disappointment caused by this decision is a matter of profound regret and the committee will keep matters under review and will advise members further as the course of the current pandemic develops.

We will invite Timothy Walker who was to speak on Harcourt Arboretum and Oxford Botanic Gardens and Hugh Granger will speak on Interactive slang, Euphemisms & Acronyms to address the society at a later date.

The committee has also taken the decision to cancel the outing on 7th May Baddesley Clinton & Packwood House. Other outings may also be subject to cancellation.

**Again, please see the Society Web Page for the latest information.**

We know in addition to the social value that monthly meetings also offer an opportunity to hear about planning matters and other developments in the village. For the present these matters will be continued under review by the committee and updates may be found either on the Society Web Page or in this monthly article. On this subject I can see some works have commenced at the Crown Pub at the top of the High Street – which has now been out of action for quite some time. I think it was scheduled to reopen at April’s end.

Perhaps by then spring will have sprung and the heavy sweet perfume of lilac will grace the narrow lanes of the village. Perhaps by then the rainy season will only be a memory. The future is always its own mystery and it is foolishness to predict what tomorrow will bring, let alone tomorrow’s weather. But we are prone to foolishness which is why we keep its birthday on April 1st.

As a boy I was taught that the prank had to happen before midday in order to be in order – and that its origin lay in the changes to the calendar in the sixteenth century. Up ‘til then at the French Court the New Year celebration ran from Lady Day on 25th March until April 1st. However, when France adopted the Gregorian Calendar in 1582 resulted 10 days were excised from the calendar one of which was 1st April. Courtiers of Charles IX and Catherine De Medici played pranks on one another and more often on the unwary - sending invitations parties or making gifts available for collection on the non-existent April 1st. The butt of the joke was an April Fish. The truth or otherwise of all of this I cannot vouch for, but the best pranks of April Fool’s Day stills bring joy to our lives and long may that continue. As Poor Robin’s Almanac in 1795 has it:

The first of April, some do say,

Is set apart for All Fools’ Day.

But why the people call it so,

Nor I, nor they themselves do know.

But on this day are people sent

 On purpose for pure merriment. John Murphy