Bicester Local History Society
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BLHS Newsletter

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Garden Archaeology talk - by Dr Stephen Wass

For the past decade landscape archaeologist Dr. Stephen Wass has been working, mainly for the National Trust, developing a better understanding of some of our greatest historic gardens. Investigating properties ranging from the medieval park at Baddesley Clinton, through seventeenth-century gardens at Hanwell and Packwood to the great landscape garden at Stowe, Stephen has used the techniques of archaeology to gain a better understanding of their construction and development and will be sharing some thoughts on how garden archaeology can support our understanding of some key moments in history.

This meeting will be held in the Clifton Centre on Monday 19th May at 7:30pm.

Poverty, Pestilence & Public Health in Victorian Britain talk - by Dr Simon Wenham

Britain may have been the 'workshop of the world' in the Victorian period, but the sceptre of poverty and pestilence loomed large over the lives of many of its citizens. A large proportion of people were not only close to the bread line, but repeated epidemics decimated whole swathes of the population. This talk explores the wealth and health of the British during the Victorian period and the State's struggle to improve conditions.

This meeting will be held in the Clifton Centre on Monday 16th June at 7:30pm.

Rousham House Visit

Our visit to Rousham House and Gardens has been arranged for Wednesday 23rd July. The house tour will commence at 2pm and will last for approximately one hour. We will then be able to explore the gardens independently. We will also be arranging tea, coffee and cake towards the end of the afternoon.

This is a subsidised outing, so only available to members. If you wish to come then please complete the form provided and return it, together with the payment, by 16th June.

Dates For Your Diary

Garden Archaeology talk
19th May @ 7:30pm

June newsletter submission deadline
4th June

Public Health in Victorian Britain talk
16th June @ 7:30pm

Rousham House visit
23rd July @ 1:45pm

Oxford Bus Museum talk - by Frank Collingwood

Frank Collingwood commenced his talk by telling us that the Oxford Bus Museum has three collections - Oxford Bus Museum, the Morris Motors Museum and the Historic Cycle Collection.

Focussing initially on the bus collection, we learnt that in 1880, with the exception of the occasional horse-drawn cab from the railway station to the hotels, there was no public transport in Oxford.

In 1881, horse-drawn trams began to run (pictured left in High Street, Oxford). A feature of the interior was the abundance of woodwork. Different coloured lamps on the front of the trams indicated each route. A replica of one of these trams has been built in the museum's workshop.

Later, university dons were permitted to live outside the university, which prompted the building of large houses in north Oxford, and extended the need for public transport. However, as late as 1913, trams were still horse-drawn as overhead wires were not wanted in the city centre.

The following year, William Morris bought six diesel buses (left) and since these were favoured by customers, Oxford City Council shut down the tram system.

The Daimler bus displayed wooden destination boards; had slatted wooden seats; was open-topped and had an outside staircase which was steep and narrow. An example from 1916 is being restored at the museum.

During WW1, female conductors were employed for the first time. A punch machine for ticketing was introduced. These buses also carried parcels.

Charabanc outings started in the 1920s and journeys could be made from Oxford to London. Country services were also established at this time and these proved to be profitable as fares could be raised outside the city.

The 1930s saw the introduction of the double-decker bus, such as the AEC Regent.

The first vehicle in the Oxford Bus Museum's collection was a 1949 AEC Regal III (right). Other examples date from the 1950s to the 1990s and include the Oxford Nipper and the Metrorider.

There is a collection of fifty cycles on permanent display at the museum. The earliest is an 1821 replica Hobby Horse, without pedals, brakes, or gears and with wooden wheels.

The velocipede or 'boneshaker' was available from the 1860s and included a brake. The first all-metal bike

was produced by Haynes & Jefferies. The 'ordinary' or 'Penny Farthing' was made c.1878 and had a huge front wheel for speed. Its tubular steel frame also made it lighter than previous models.

The Coventry Rotary Tricycle, from about 1880, was also designed with large wheels.

The 1873 'sociable' tricycle encouraged women to take up cycling.

Bicycles are synonymous with Oxford, especially amongst students. It was students' enthusiasm for cycling that led William Morris (later Lord Nuffield) to repair and then build bicycles (prior to moving into car repair, hire and, finally, manufacture).

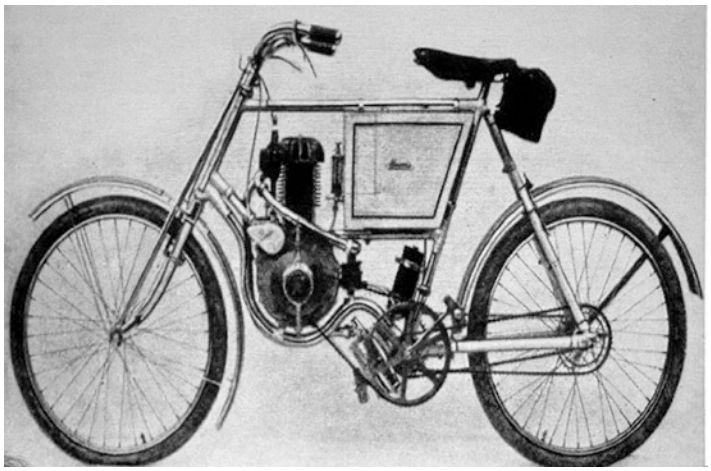
William Morris was a successful racing cyclist in the Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire region, gaining publicity for his business in the process.

Morris exhibited his motor bicycle at the Stanley Show in 1902. In 1913, Morris moved on to the production of the 'bullnose' Morris. The museum has a collection of both cars and vans in this series.

Further success came with the production of the Morris Minor series in 1948, which included a van designed for the GPO. Morris Minors were used as police cars in the 1960s.

The museum, which received the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in 2018, has free tours as part of the Oxford Open Doors events; offers heritage bus rides; develops new displays and attends events in the county.

The "Hobby Horse"



The Morris motorcycle, exhibited in 1902.

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