

BLHA AGM & ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2016

Held on Saturday, 18 June 2016
Hosted by Sharnbrook Local History Group

‘OUR COMMUNITIES, OUR STORIES: RESEARCHING OUR LOCAL HERITAGE’

Keynote Speaker:

PROFESSOR CARENZA LEWIS

Professor of the Public Understanding of Research at Lincoln University
and one of the original *Time Team* presenters

AGM: At the AGM the present BLHA Committee was re-elected *en bloc* and the Resolution for the alteration of the Constitution item 4(h) to ‘No Officer shall serve more than five consecutive years unless co-opted by the majority of the committee on an annual basis’ was adopted after a vote. This was to remedy a situation where replacements for retiring committee officers who have served their five-year term are not forthcoming at an AGM. The committee proposed that the five-year rule may be over-ridden by co-opting the officer to remain on the committee until a replacement can be found. This required the amendment of the appropriate constitution item 4 (h) which stated that: ‘No Officer shall serve more than five consecutive years. On expiration of this period two further years must elapse before any former Officer shall be eligible for election or re-election to any office.’

Annual Conference. A **welcome to the Conference** by June Barnes, Chair of the Sharnbrook Local History Group followed the AGM. She pointed out that, when asked to stage a Conference three years ago they had decided to ask to do it in their 10th anniversary year of 2016 to mark the progress of their Group in those 10 years and show what had been achieved by the Sharnbrook Group.

The keynote speaker, Professor Carenza Lewis, then gave a stimulating talk on **Researching our Local Heritage** which showed how involvement in community archaeology and local history can improve the lives not just of ordinary participants but those who are marginalised or who have other issues and how local history societies and groups can obtain funding for such activities. She also showed how people can be engaged, how these programmes and activities can be embedded and sustained, how to plan for succession, and also research, training and assessing the impact of the work.

Professor Lewis gave several examples from Bedfordshire (including Sharnbrook which was a pioneer in this field), Hertfordshire and Suffolk where local research, test-pit digging, field walking and other activities had led to analysis of the results which helped to show more about the effects of the Black Death, occupation of still occupied sites over the centuries and determining the location and use of buildings and structures.

June Barnes then spoke on **Discovering Sharnbrook’s Medieval Story** which recounted how the Sharnbrook Group’s work had resulted in much greater knowledge of their village. The excavations at Castle Close, which were an integral part of this, are ongoing. Castle Close is a 12th century moated earthwork situated in woodland. Sixty-eight test pits were dug in which the whole community was involved including school students. Pottery from the Roman to Medieval periods was discovered. This was helped by Heritage Lottery funding and the overgrown earthwork at Castle Close had to be cleared of vegetation and they had to obtain consent to proceed as it was a scheduled monument. In addition to pottery, horseshoe nails, a D-shaped buckle and pin, limestone pads were also discovered and there was reason to believe this was a moderately high status site, but probably a moated manor house rather than a castle, because ovens had been excavated (indicated by charred grains and blackened earth) which were kept separate from the main buildings because of fire risk.

After this talk delegates were given the option of a visit to Castle Close, with a chance to try field surveying or shovel pit-digging, or to have a walk around the Sharnbrook Heritage Trail to see some of the interesting buildings in the village.

Following an excellent buffet lunch the Conference resumed with a talk by Dorothy Jamieson on **Bedfordshire in 1670: evidence from the Hearth Tax Returns**. Continuing adroitly in spite of projector failures, Dorothy managed to show how the returns could be used to build a picture of

Bedfordshire in the 1670s with regard to population, prosperity and even literacy, over the Hundreds of Bedfordshire and also in regard to her own village of Willington.

The next talk, **Queens Park Lives**: by Neslyn Pearson assisted by Jim Hull gave information on an oral history project undertaken in the Queens Park area of Bedford to gather the memories of local residents of their lives in the area. The project involved one-to-one interviews with volunteers and well-supported meetings with the results published in a series of magazines.

Colin Watt then presented **Clophill & Sharnbrook – a comparative study using census data** showing that, by comparing the returns under the various headings of the census summary form between the two villages, analysis could be made of the condition and lives of the occupants at the times of the 19th century censuses. He was also able to show the distribution of surnames in the British Isles against those occurring in the two villages thus showing possible inward migration to them.

The final talk of the afternoon was by Des Hoar based on his new book **Beats, Boots & Poachers**. This covered the history of the establishment of a police force in North Bedfordshire and the types of poachers who were apprehended by that force. These moved on from the local man poaching for the pot to feed his family to organised gangs coming out from Luton and continual offenders.

The day was summed up by Martin Lawrence, MBE, Vice-President of the BLHA, who thanked the Sharnbrook Group on behalf of the delegates for a stimulating and interesting day and an excellent lunch.

Photos from the conference



Professor Carena Lewis giving the keynote talk



June Barnes welcoming the delegates



Clive Makin (Hon Sec), Mollie Foster (Chair),
Mike Brown (Treasurer), and Colin West at the AGM



Conference in Session



Dorothy Jamieson talking
on Bedfordshire in 1670:
evidence from the hearth
tax returns



George Howe from Potton learning surveying on the pre-
lunch visit to Castle Close

Ted Martin

History in Bedfordshire Editor, Bedfordshire Local History Association