

The annual **Bedfordshire Local History Association local history conference** was this year organised and hosted by Clapham Historical Society on **Saturday 13 June 2015**. This is the third time that Clapham has hosted the event (more than any other society in the county).

The conference began with the Association's AGM. There followed a varied and informative range of talks, and a village walk in neighbouring Felmersham, as well as the usual opportunity to see what various societies from around the county were doing, through a number of displays of their material, plus time to meet up socially with fellow local history enthusiasts.



'Photo by Stuart Antrobus'

The presentations began with an interesting talk by Clapham historian, John Woods, about the village and, in particular, its world-renowned church with a rare Saxon tower.



'Photos by Stuart Antrobus'



Those who felt energetic enough (and were prepared to cope with a slight drizzle) took cars to Felmersham where Ken Shrimpton outlined the many distinctive features of the parish church. Notable among these were a rare surviving medieval screen which escaped the ravages which many suffered during the time of the Reformation, and its glorious Early English west front which, next to Dunstable Priory, must be one of the best in the county. Outside, the group admired the medieval Tithe Barn, sensitively adapted to domestic use by architect Bernard West, and the attractive stone bridge over the River Great Ouse. (Those who decided not to join the guided walk remained in Clapham Village Hall to see a range of videos of local interest.)

A buffet lunch was then provided of such a standard of presentation that one wondered if one had accidentally gate-crashed a wedding in the hall. Attendees all agreed that it was the best conference lunch they had ever had and was a credit to the Clapham organisers and their wonderful caterers.



'Photos by Stuart Antrobus'

The afternoon programme opened with an illustrated talk by guest lecturer Margaret Badley on what to look for in villages, both historic and in terms of how villages adapt over times, including the impact of the digital age through many service agencies being based in villages today, thanks to the Internet. The offerings continued with a brief presentation by Ken Shrimpton on Edward Arpins's diary of life in Felmersham as a parish clerk and gravedigger with a lively interest in the increasing price of bread and local gossip.

Elizabeth Skinner, long-time resident of Bromham Hall, spoke about the history of the house and its occupants and finally, Mollie Foster (whose committee had masterminded the whole day) and Sheila Bull delivered a brief potted history of Clapham over the centuries, to round off the day.



'Photo by Stuart Antrobus'

Over 50 individuals, most from some 16 local history societies and organisations, attended the conference and contributed to the various question and answer sessions after each talk.

Martin Lawrence, who was instrumental with others in setting up the Bedfordshire Local History Association over 30 years ago, as an umbrella organisation for local history in the county, thanked all those responsible for putting on such a successful conference and looked forward to next year's BLHA conference which is to be hosted by Sharnbrook Local History Group on Saturday 18 June.

Stuart Antrobus,
Bedford Architectural, Archaeological and Local History Society.