

The Parish Pump

The Journal of the Marden Society

November 2010

Benjamin Harrison—Grocer & Archaeologist



Had you ever heard of Benjamin Harrison, Archaeologist, before our meeting – and not the American president? Well I was ignorant of both. The English one was born in Ightham in 1837, the year Victoria came to the throne and Disraeli was the MP for Maidstone. Coming from an ordinary family, he left school at 14 but continued to educate himself in botany, geology and archaeology amongst other things. Benjamin ran his father's grocery shop – however it was said he had

a rich museum but a poor shop.

Angela Muthana, a volunteer at Maidstone Museum, was full of praise for this unsung hero whose work was not fully appreciated at the time. Don't we all have some sneaking admiration for amateurs who rival the professionals? His first interest was searching for ferns, abundant in the local valleys, until the Victorian fashion for such greenery meant that traders from Covent Garden came and greatly diminished the variety and supply. Wandering by the Strode Stream Benjamin explored the gravel bed and found Palaeolithic hand tools in plenty. Next he climbed the North Downs seeking fossils.

At Oldbury Hill he was given a grant of £15 for his excavations, whereupon he paid the workers extra for each artefact found. He was experienced enough not to be hoodwinked and to recognise the real thing from a hastily knapped stone!

It was a busy life – up at 3.00 in the morning to go exploring before he went to his shop. One small help was the introduction of Bank Holidays in 1871 by Lubbock, another Maidstone MP.



Controversy arose over the stones, which he called eoliths. Benjamin was sure that these were more primitive hand-worked tools than had been previously recognised, but many of the experts disagreed with him. When requested he sent collections of stones all over the world. Many famous people visited him – Conan Doyle, Keir Hardy and Charles Dickens, to name a few; also he attended the funeral of Darwin. Not bad connections for a village grocer. His house, Old Stones, was restored by his son, Sir Edward and can be seen today as an impressive dwelling.

Angela brought this man to human life with different snippets from letters to him. His handwriting was notoriously bad. "I would have returned these two stones before, but I have been prevented by the intense heat, by blue-bottles, flies, wasps and by the /cont'd on next page

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profane language of a friend called in to help me decipher your last communication.

I have been able to where I had read 'all the words were 'all meaning.'" Even the modest difference to typewritten envelope.



read none properly. In places humbug', someone suggested that harmony', quite a different advent of a typewriter made only a things. "Glad indeed to see the Your previous letter in a large envelope was delivered here with the address loose. You should use paste for attaching new addresses, your village marmalade is not strong enough."

His gravestone says,

He found in life,
Books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones
And good in everything.

It is only now that his collections of stones are being dug out of the dusty depths of museums to be re-evaluated and is theories about eoliths may well prove to be correct.

MARDEN SOCIETY NOVEMBER MEETING

Our November meeting will be a talk by Chris Wade on the second part of his walk on the Saxon Shoreway. His earlier talk took the pathway as far Faversham, and this time he will start at Reculver to the end of the Shoreway.

The Shoreway stretches for 173 miles from Gravesend to Rye. Chris works for the KCC and looks after village greens and common land legislation. He liaises with the Ramblers' Association.

If the second part is as interesting as the first, it will be a very good evening and we hope to see as many of you as possible at the meeting

MAUREEN CLAYTON (Chairman)

REMINDER FOR THE AGM – 26 January 2011

Please remember that nominations for the election of Officers and to the Executive Committee shall be in writing to the Honorary Secretary seven days before each Annual General Meeting These shall be supported by a seconder and the consent of the proposed nominee must first have been obtained. Nominees, their proposers and seconds must all be fully paid up Members as at the date of such nomination. A simple secret ballot shall, if necessary, take place to determine the Officers and Members of the Executive Committee.

The post of Secretary is still unfilled. Nominations are urgently needed.

Graham's Reminences

MARDEN CARNIVAL WEEK cont'd

The Saturday of Marden Carnival Week 1963 was, as you may imagine, the Grand Finale.

Events started at 1.30 pm, giving time for those who had spent all of Friday night dancing to a popular jazz band at the Memorial Hall to catch a few hours sleep followed by the hair of the dog at the Unicorn. Dozens -perhaps hundreds - of village folk lined the streets to see the grand procession of floats through the village. Led by the Carnival Queen's float of a white swan, they started at the Beech and slowly crawled their way up Goudhurst Road to the High Street eventually circling round to finish back at the fete field. The floats were decorated lorries - sometimes you couldn't even see the cab - borrowed from local firms: Mumford's,



Tippen's, Finch and Preston and depicted a topical event or current TV or Radio show and local clubs and societies spent hours of work building them. People on the floats often collected money for charity as they passed, or squirted you with water. Following the floats was the fancy dress parade and then a wheelbarrow race, also in fancy dress. Prizes were presented

in the High Street with police on duty to direct or divert the traffic.

Things really got going on the fete field itself around 3.00 with a dog show. Then there was a sea cadet band, a display by Pamela's Royal Wolfhounds (what they did I can't remember), a baby show (similar to the dog show, except the babies didn't have to beg or jump over hurdles), children's & adult sports and tug of war. Pam's hounds were so good they returned at 6.45 for a repeat performance and the showing entertainment finally finished at 7.30 as the sea cadets played out. A quick dash home, wash and brush up and off to the Grand Dance!

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VINEYARD QUIZ RESULTS

We have now finished picking the 2010 crop. We were astonished by the weight of fruit - in fact there is considerably more than even our highest estimate. Because I initially stated the weight would be between 9 and 12 tonnes I made it impossible for anyone to get close - which seems rather unfair.

Only one entrant guessed more than 12 tonnes - **Patricia Maynard**- who won top prize of a bottle of champagne and tour of the vineyard and winery.

Because I misled everybody on the potential crop size all other entrants had another go at entering.

That winner was **Rod Sampson** who guessed 15.32 tonnes; he also received a bottle champagne and a private tour of the Vineyard

The actual crop was 15.3 tonnes

Congratulations

NICHOLAS HALL

AUTUMN

Come, said the wind to the leaves one day,

Come o'er the meadow with me and play.

Put on your bright dress of red and gold,

For summer has gone and the days grow cold.

For me, this song that I sang in the Infants' School has always personified my favourite season of the year. Other people may wax lyrical about Spring but in my opinion, for sheer variety of colour, it doesn't begin to compare with Autumn. Who would guess that the rather uniform colour of leaves in the Spring would give us such a vivid display in the Autumn?

I like to think that the colour of Autumn leaves takes the place of the brightly coloured flowers during the rest of the year. This year the Virginia Creepers have been more bright than usual. The Field Maples with their bright yellow leaves have cheered the eyes. My favourite Amelanchier (or Snowy Mespilus) have shown different coloured leaves even on a single tree. I have to admit though, that this tree is beautiful in all the seasons. Who else gets the same pleasure as I do in walking through Autumn leaves and crunching them underfoot? There is something really satisfying in hearing the crisp crackle!

In hindsight, Guy Fawkes and his fellow conspirators could not have chosen a more suitable time of year to carry out their plot. Of course, they were not to know that future generations would celebrate its failure by burning bonfires and lighting fireworks. We wouldn't really enjoy them so much in the Summer. For one thing it doesn't get dark so early and it would surely be too warm to want to stand near a bonfire.

Given a clear Autumn sky the fireworks show to much better effect against the stars.

When I was in the Women's Land Army in 1949, I was sent to Sussex where there is a tradition of celebrating Guy Fawkes Day. I used to go with other girls to a nearby village, Small Dole, to walk in procession to the next village, Wisborough Green. We were all given torches, which were about two feet long, the tops of which were soaked in some slow burning oil.

The scene was quite impressive, as about a hundred people moved slowly along the lanes. I remember thinking once, that we only needed hoods and we could have been mistaken for the Ku Klux Klan! Except, of course, that we were going to burn Guy Fawkes and not crosses. The bonfire was lit on the village green not far from the pub.

At this time of the year I remember those evenings and wonder if the tradition still holds.

I have never heard of anywhere in Kent where November 5th is celebrated in quite that way

EDITH DAVIS

ADVANCE NOTICE

Annual General Meeting to be held on 26 January 2011
at 8 pm in the Old School Room, The Memorial Hall,
Followed by a Cheese & Wine Social

The Parish Pump is distributed free to Members of The Marden Society every two months



For details of Membership please contact the Membership Secretary
Aileen Hill on 01622 831904