

## 50 YEARS OF THE GORING GAP LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

In April 1966 a report appeared in *Goring Parish Magazine* headed 'Goring Historical Record Society'. It noted that

*'Considerable interest has been expressed from time to time in compiling a documented history of Goring and its institutions. Although several authors have described Goring in early times, there is little on record of its development during the past 200 years from a small Thames-side village to a thriving residential community. In recent years, the pace of change has been marked and certain buildings of historical interest are disappearing from the scene. Many records of life in Goring during the early part of this [20<sup>th</sup>] century, together with letters and photographs, are being destroyed or dispersed. The history of Goring's many clubs, societies and institutions has never been written. With a view to compiling a record of the recent history of the village and of our contemporary life, the Goring Historical Record Society is being formed.'*

With these admirable aims in mind, a group of like-minded people met at Goring Primary School on Monday 28 February to try and get the ball rolling. The outcome was a further meeting on Monday 4 April at the Scout Hut, Cleeve at which Goring Local History Society formally came into being.

The objectives of the Society, as set out in its constitution, were

*'To encourage interest in the local history of Goring and District. To bring together persons with similar interests to work together in specific aspects of local history. To arrange lectures, meetings and visits by members of the Society. To arrange for cataloguing of and safe-keeping of items of local interest presented to the Society.'*

The first Chairman was Dr Ron Dell. Initial membership was about 30 but grew steadily from the outset and by 1969 had reached 80, by 1982 it was 128 and in recent years has averaged around 190. To recognize members from Streatley, the name of the Society was changed in 1985 to Goring and Streatley Local History Society. Last year (and not without some controversy), to reflect an even broader geographical membership, the name changed again to Goring Gap Local History Society.

### Activities

The Society was soon into its stride and the first AGM minutes in 1967 record that members had enjoyed attending four talks from guest speakers and two coach outings – to Snowhill Manor and Avebury. Such was the enthusiasm that a successful exhibition was held in the Free Church Hall attended by nearly 1,000 visitors. In those early years there was also a formal annual dinner for members at a local hotel.

These events set the pattern for future activities which have always included a programme of monthly talks, outings, and exhibitions, sometimes in collaboration with other local organisations. In September 1968 the Society joined with the Goring Gap Players in



*The first exhibition, Free Church, 1967 [GGLHS]*

staging a *Son et Lumiere* presentation in Goring churchyard.

*Right:  
Son et Lumiere  
on Goring church,  
1968 [GGLHS]*



Exhibitions have included the Silver Jubilee (1977), a display in Goring's twin French town Bellême (1982), Wallingford Museum for 10 weeks (1982), Streatley Domesday celebrations (1986), a display in Goring Church to mark the centenary of the apse restoration (1988), 'The Way We Were' (1993), the River Thames – staged at Oxford (1994), VE Day 50th anniversary (1995), the Millennium Exhibition (1999), the Queen's Golden Jubilee (2002), Goring Library (2011), the Queen's Diamond Jubilee (2012) and our latest triumph, the World War I centenary weekend (2014).

Exhibitions & Activities, credit [GGLHS]



We do our best to promote interest in the history of the area to a wider audience and in recent years we have organised guided walks of the two villages for the public. Members also give talks on Goring and Streatley to other organisations in the locality. It was our pleasure in 2007 to host the Annual Meeting of the Berkshire Local History Association, attended by representatives of many other local history societies.

### Publications

The Society has published two illustrated books on the local area: *A Picture History of Goring and Streatley* in 1986 and *Another Look at Goring and Streatley* in 1999. An annual journal containing articles contributed by members has been produced since 1998, along with numerous typescript monographs on a wide range of topics. There are also guided walk leaflets available for Goring and Streatley which have proved popular with visitors over the years.

### Archives

Apart from its social and educational activities, a primary objective has been to collect, preserve and store photographs, documents, books, pictures and maps that relate to the history of Goring, Streatley and district. The Society has been fortunate to receive many gifts of such items which have all been carefully catalogued. After being housed in a committee members' home for some time, we now have the use of a designated archives room in the Community Centre, which was formerly the National School. The archives reside in what was once the headmaster's bedroom! Visitors are welcome by appointment and researchers into local history matters receive every encouragement to pursue their interests.

*Archives open morning in the Community Centre [GGLHS]*



Every now and then the Archivist organises a coffee morning in the Community Centre where visitors can inspect a selection of archives from the collection.

A recent innovation has been to hold a monthly local and family history 'drop-in' at Goring Library, again with the aim of encouraging people to make use of the Society's resources.

### Transport History Group

In 2008, the Society's annual outing was to Milestones Museum at Basingstoke, followed by a train trip on the Watercress Line in Hampshire. This was very popular and led member Mike Hurst to start a special group for fellow members interested in the various aspects of transport history. The first trip he organised was to Didcot Railway Centre, getting there by train from Goring Station, of course. About 20 people signed up to the group at the beginning, but now the majority of Society members are on the mailing list. A small

committee assists Mike in organising nine or ten outings each year to places or events associated with trains, boats, planes, cars or motorbikes. Travel is by public transport whenever possible, although sometimes it is necessary to go in shared cars or hire a coach.

### *A Transport History Group outing to Beaulieu [GGLHS]*

The Transport History Group has led to other developments, including the involvement of some members in running the private Fawley Hill Railway and Museum near Henley and in negotiating a pick-up stop at Goring Station for travellers on the steam specials run by the company Steam Dreams. The most successful of these was the trip to Worcester organised as part of the village's Queen's Diamond Jubilee



celebrations when the whole station was decorated with bunting and hundreds of people thronged the platforms to wave off the travellers. The Group has also been instrumental in ensuring that important artefacts were not lost during the extensive construction work at the station as part of the electrification of the line. One of the buildings was carefully taken down brick by brick and transported to Wallingford where it will be re-erected at the station of the preserved Cholsey and Wallingford Railway.

In addition to organising outings, Mike Hurst also produces a regular newsletter covering recent and future activities of the Group, profusely illustrated with colour photographs.

### **A Blue Plaque**

Boatbuilder Sam Saunders was one of Goring and Streatley's many famous inhabitants. He eventually became the founder of an international aviation company on the Isle of

*Below: The Blue Plaque to Sam Saunders [Ron Bridle]*

Wight. Born at the Swan at Streatley in 1859 his innovative skills in developing and building all manner of river craft soon led to the expansion of his business across the river to Goring. Here he commissioned a local architect to design a boatworks and showroom by the bridge. This building, now housing the Royal Mail Sorting Office and the dental surgery, is the site of a Blue Plaque to Sam that resulted from the Society's successful application to the Oxfordshire Blue Plaques Board in 2013. The unveiling ceremony, reception and accompanying exhibition was a great day for the Society.



## Management and governance

Over its first 50 years the Society has benefited from a succession of hard-working and dedicated officers and committee members who have striven successfully to fulfil the aims of the first (and subsequent) constitutions. Prominent past members include Ray Carter, Ethel Carleton-Williams, Dr Ron Dell, Charles Dixon, Edward French, Frank Godsell, Alfred Mortimer, Meg Murray, Charles Preuveneers, Eleanor and Tony Simpson and Philip Skottowe. Of the founder members, a few are still with us, including Ron Dell, Daphne Baker and Tony Merrell. Notably Jenny Emerton, currently the Archivist, has been a member from the beginning and is still on the committee today!

*Below: Ethel Carleton Williams, the Society's first President [GGLHS]*

The present committee salute their predecessors and look forward to taking a thriving organisation into its next decade, helping to promote the study of local history throughout the Goring Gap.

**Janet Hurst**  
Secretary

