



# HANLEY MATTERS

the newsletter of  
The Hanleys' Village Society

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## FORTHCOMING ACTIVITIES

### 25 March 2011

Talk by **Brian Jauncey**  
on the history of  
**Madresfield Court**.  
Village Hall, 7.30 pm.

### 28 April 2011

Tour of **Madresfield  
Court** by **Brian  
Jauncey**. Tickets £10  
from **David Thomas**.  
Madresfield Court car  
park, 10.30 am.

## HOLYWELL SPRING WATER

Thanks to the hard and ancient rocks of the Malvern Hills, "Malvern water is famous for containing just nothing at all...!" So said Dr John Wall in 1747 after finding that it contained very few minerals. And the oldest of the spring waters to be exploited is Holy Well, dating back to 1558 when John Hornyold of Blackmore Park bought the lordship of the manor of Hanley Castle from the crown and with it the rights to the spring. A condition was that he allowed pilgrims to stop and refresh themselves at the well on their way to Wales. Even today, there are two rooms at the well, one for rest and the other for refreshment as people come to drink the water.

The present owner, Mike Humm, gave members an amusing account of his battles with planners, builders and environment authorities as he and his wife Marian bought the well in 1999 and then decided to restore it. They found the remains of a bottling plant with thousands of 2-litre plastic bottles dating from 1977, when John and Thelma Parkes briefly reopened the well after their own 7-year restoration programme, having bought the business from Cuff & Co.

Holy Well water has a long and interesting history. As far back as the 12th century, St Oswald is said to have revealed the medicinal powers of the Well to a hermit on the hills and there are stories of monks wrapping cloths steeped in this water around ill patients. According to a poem written around 1590, although not published until 1622, water from the Well was bottled at the rate of a thousand bottles a week, making it the source of the UK's first bottled water. In his diary, John Evelyn records making a detour to the Well in 1654.



*Holy Well Mineral Water Factory in 1904*

During the 18th century the purity of the water made Holy Well Malvern's most popular destination for people seeking a cure for various ailments. In 1843 the Hornyold family erected a well house based on a building in Baden-Baden and leased extraction to Schweppes, who opened the first commercial bottling plant in 1850. The water was introduced at the Great Exhibition of 1851 as Malvern Soda, renamed Malvern Seltzer Water in 1856. In 1890 Schweppes moved to Colwall and Holy Well was leased to John and Henry Cuff, who bought the site from the Hornyold family at the break-up of the estate in 1919; their company continued bottling water until the 1960s.

Mike Humm brought the story up to date with a touching story about bats. Soon after starting restoration work, the builders walked out because they found bats, more specifically two lesser horseshoe bats, a protected species. English Nature issue licences to allow building work to continue provided the bat habitat is protected, but refused in this case because they were being sued by bat activists. So Mike made his own arrangements and called in a bat man to design a luxury apartment for the creatures along the back wall of the well house. However, because the bats enter the building from the front, a tunnel had to be built through the bottling room, with the image of a bat at the entrance, so that they could fly unimpeded to their roost.

Heritage Lottery funding has seen the well chamber and rest room refurbished by the Malvern Spa Association, and a new Visitors Centre has

been created in front of the bottling room.

Following the closure of Coca Cola's Colwall plant, demand for Holywell spring water has increased dramatically. It is classified as spring water because it is bottled at source from a recognised underground spring. In addition to a 75 cl table bottle, Mike and his son Rhys have introduced a 330 ml bottle and aim to increase output to the maximum of 1200 bottles a day, still and sparkling.

Recently, a local resident wrote to Buckingham Palace suggesting that the Queen might like to switch to Holywell water now that the supply of her favourite Malvern water had dried up, so to speak. Mike Humm provided a quote, but lost the contract because his water was too expensive. Good to know that Her Majesty is conscious of the need to make economies in these hard times.

## **AGM & POSTAL BALLOT**

At the AGM it was announced that a postal ballot of members to decide whether or not to adopt a new constitution adding a 'civic' element to the Society's activities had resulted in a vote of more than two to one against. However, because it would help the Society's chances of being accepted as a charity, the meeting voted in favour of adopting a simplified constitution that omitted the controversial additional clause.

Jenny McGowran was elected as chairman to replace Ian Bowles. Other committee changes were Graham Thomas to stand down and Andrew Milne and Tony Parsons to join.

## **WORKING BOATS**

In his talk on the British Waterways heritage working boats project, narrow boat skipper Vince Williams explained that for 150 years these boats used to carry goods along Britain's 2000 miles of canals.

But most have rotted away and in 1999 British Waterways secured a Heritage Lottery Grant of £211,000 to rescue some of the craft that were left. Over the years, a dozen volunteers have worked on seven boats, most built in the 1930s, a canal tug built in 1912, a more modern ice-breaker tug and a piling rig.

Typically, heavy cargo was carried by pairs of boats: a motor boat with a capacity of 25 tons towing a butty boat carrying 30 tons. Restoration sometimes requires stripping a boat down to the bare frame and using skilled repairers to rebuild, so that the work can take 2 years and cost £32,000.

In a fascinating look at a way of life now past, Vince Williams explained how families lived on a 71' 6" long x 7' wide narrow boat. The cabin was 8' 6" long x 6' 4" wide, just big enough to take a double mattress 6' 4" long x 2' 6" wide - cozy. A 6' long single bed would, if necessary, sleep two children head to toe, and a drawer was used as a cot for the baby. A small oven was designed to take a chicken or a duck and a cupboard acted as a pantry, the door dropping down to form a table.

Two well-known terms come directly from canal life: 'legging it' from the practice of children steering a boat along a tunnel with their legs and 'toe-rag' from the rags wrapped around their toes to protect their feet.