

Sudbury History Society

Tribute to Barry Wall

Talk by Ashley Cooper on 12th February 2020

Our scheduled speaker was unable to attend due to ill health and Ashley Cooper kindly stood in for him. Ashley wanted to take the opportunity to make a Tribute to Barry Wall. Ashley praised Barry for being a support and inspiration to him over the years as he had gladly shared his vast historical knowledge and detailed local research.

Barry started his research in the days before computers and the internet: gathering his knowledge by travelling down to London to visit archives and libraries to investigate documents. Locally, he knocked on townspeople's doors to research old Sudbury houses and crawl around attics and cellars. Barry said he was never refused admittance. Prior to Barry's excellent books "Sudbury" and "Sudbury Through the Ages", there were hardly any books available about the History of Sudbury apart from a few such as the Grimwood and Kaye book from the 1950s. Barry helped Ashley by giving talks to the Bulmer & District History Group, enthusiastically sharing his knowledge in an "easy to understand" way.

When Barry was a youngster, he came to live in Gestingthorpe for a short while. It was a cold, snowy winter and Ashley was impressed that Barry built himself a sledge and together with his boxer dog, Bengy, went miles to collect provisions for the local villagers – and even the pension of one old lady. Barry did research and raised interest in Gestingthorpe church: the stained-glass windows dedicated to the Oates family and the double hammerbeam roof. Barry found out that this roof was the work of the local carpenter, Thomas Loveday, who also built the choir stalls at St John's College Cambridge.

In Sudbury, standing near Salters' Hall, Barry showed Ashley where the Saxon Great Ditch was located which brought the old medieval layout of Sudbury to life. In the early 1990s, an archaeological dig at St Gregory's school had unearthed the Saxon Ditch for the first time. Ashley also mentioned Barry's extensive research into the history of St Gregory's church and Simon of Sudbury's College. Barry also rectified some errors: for example the Hospital next to Ballingdon Bridge was wrongly attributed to the Knights of St John. Barry found out that the Knights Templar had property in Church Street in Sudbury. The Hospital next to Ballingdon Bridge belonged to Amicia de Clare. When the bridge was built, the toll proceeds went to the Hospital, which maintained the bridge.

Ashley's talk was very interesting and entertaining, illustrated by attractive, detailed pictures by Benjamin Perkins. It was a fitting tribute to Sudbury's eminent Historian, Barry Wall.