

sava

STEEPLE ASTON VILLAGE ARCHIVE TRUST

## A Gallery of Village Characters

Some remarkable people have lived in and around Steeple and Middle Aston over the years, some famous (or notorious) in the wider world, others appreciated only by those who knew them for the contribution they made to the quality of village life. This year's SAVA exhibition, held in the Village Hall on 14 & 15 November, focussed on Steeple Aston Personalities, selecting a variety of individuals from both categories.

From the village itself there were characters like Connie Franks, whose dazzling cottage garden on Southside did eventually reach a wider audience through books and television – her interview by Anna Pavord for Channel Four was played throughout the exhibition; John Walton, village butcher, fundraiser and patriarch of a large still-thriving family; Harold Grant, school caretaker, scoutmaster and a First World War veteran who stepped forward again to instruct the Home Guard in WW2; and Charlie Preston, whose life-long career as the village fruit-and-veg man was interrupted by a spell as a tank gunner and prisoner of war.

There was Canon Michael Hayter, Rector here for 37 years beginning just after the second war – as recounted in his own book “The Rector of Steeple Aston” – and founder of the village choral society; and Vivian Pearson, headmaster of Dr Radcliffe's School in the years just before the last war. There was Joan Steel, who taught and inspired generations of the village children, and Vera Calver, who cooked their school dinners for more than forty years, while devoting her energies to villagers of all ages, including the old folks of the Valentine Club (even when she was herself older than most of them); Lawrence Fields, local builder, wheelwright and undertaker, who gave his name to one of the newer village streets; Arthur Wadham, village milkman and all-round character.

A little further back in time William Wing, farmer and land agent, compiled our first village history, and witnessed at first hand the rise and fall of Charles Harris, the violin-maker who bankrupted himself as lord of the manor. Characters from further back in that history were also remembered, men like Dr Samuel Radcliffe, who founded our school, and Richard Duckworth, an unpopular rector who was one of its early headmasters.

The second half of the exhibition focussed mainly on people who, though residing in the village at some time in their lives, made their mark in the wider world, some of them in distant places - as far-flung as the Rocky Mountains, where Walter Moberly searched for routes for the Canadian Pacific railway, or Lake Eyre in South Australia, named after the settler, explorer and colonial administrator Edward John Eyre; Captain (later Vice-Admiral) Lechmere missed out at Trafalgar, but commanded HMS Thunderer at the Battle of Cape Finisterre; Captain Richard Bradshaw fired the first British torpedo against Chile's navy in 1877; Judge John Page made his reputation as a “hanging judge” in the London law courts; Thomas David served at Windsor as surgeon to King William IV; Iris Murdoch lived for thirty years in Steeple Aston while writing novels that were read and admired throughout the English-speaking world.

All these and more were featured in the exhibition – if you missed it, you will still be able to catch up with it in the form of a new booklet to be published by SAVA in the coming months.

GEOFFREY LANE

## Holiday Cottage Available

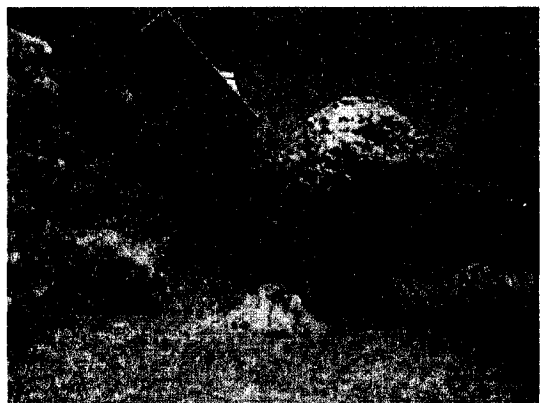
Pretty Stone Cottage in Steeple Aston available  
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