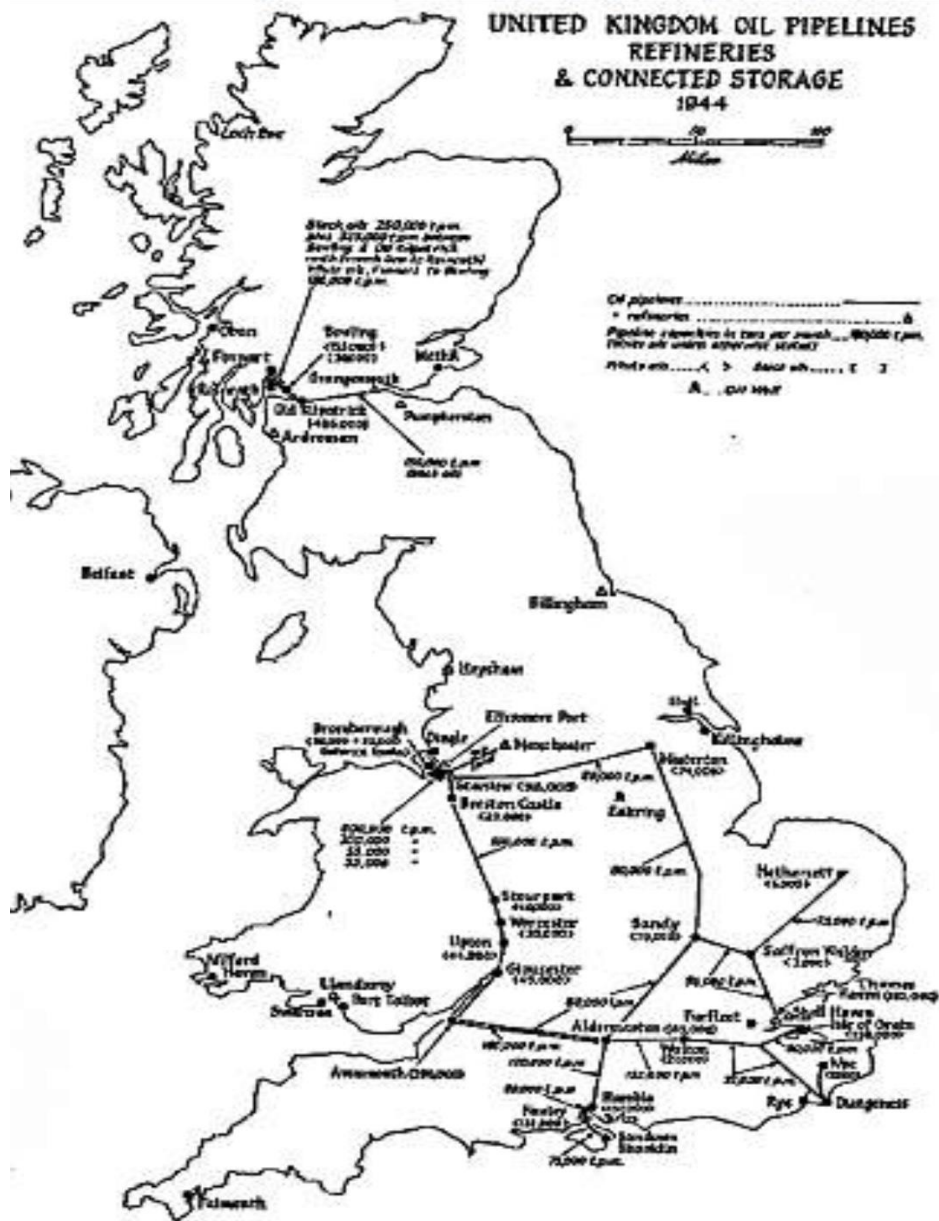


Wye Historical Society

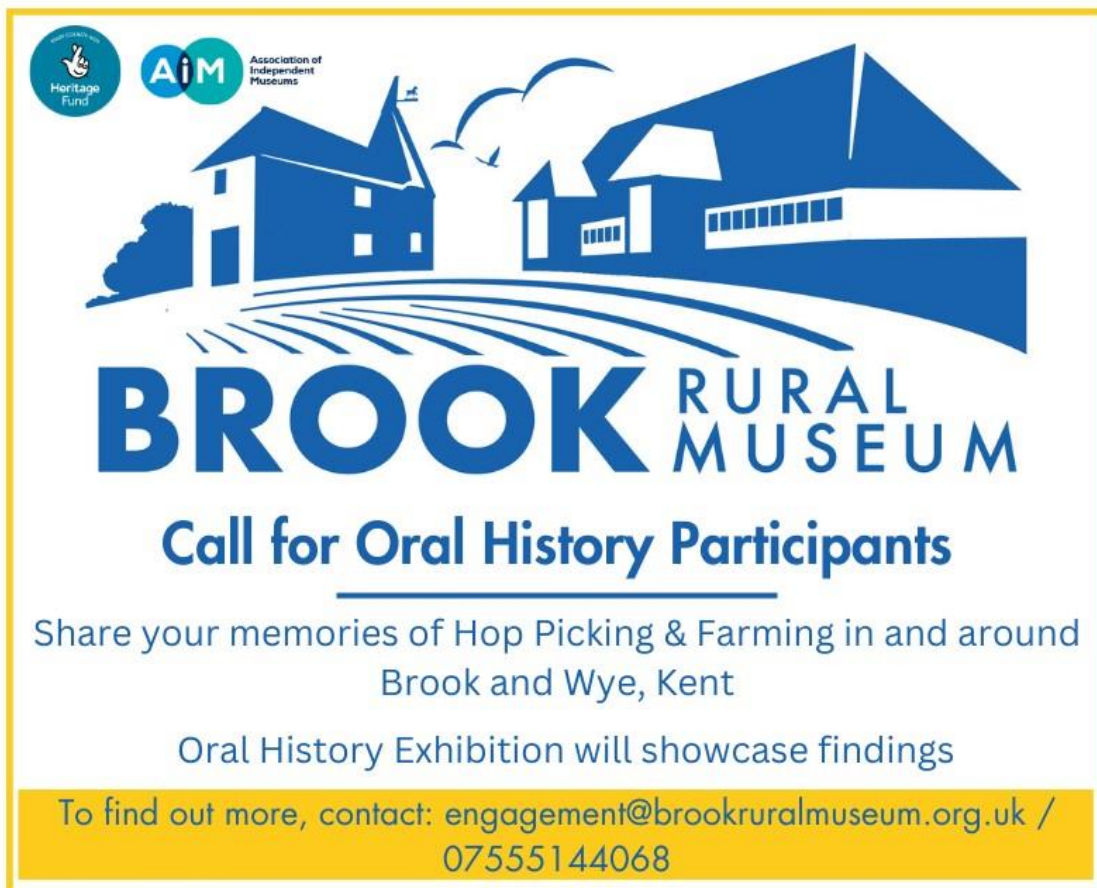


1944 map of oil pipelines showing the Wye depot

Newsletter February 2024

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BROOK RURAL MUSEUM

Call for Oral History Participants

Share your memories of Hop Picking & Farming in and around
Brook and Wye, Kent

Oral History Exhibition will showcase findings

To find out more, contact: engagement@brookruralmuseum.org.uk /
07555144068



The Street, Brook, Ashford, TN25 5PF
brookruralmuseum.org.uk

Following Sue Duckworth's Lecture on 2 November 2022 "Hopping in Kent", at which several members stood to describe their own experiences, Margaret Bray brought some of these memories together in her article in the August 2023 Newsletter. Since then, Wye Historical Society has been delighted to support Brook Rural Museum's successful application for grant funding from the Association of Independent Museums and the National Lottery Heritage Fund to create an oral history. The following article describes the project and invites members of the public to come forward to record their memories for public exhibition and archiving.



'Local Stories: Memories of Hopping around Brook and Wye, Kent'

Brook Rural Museum (formerly Brook Agricultural Museum) is located in the village of Brook, near Wye, Kent. The museum consists of a Grade I listed 14th century barn and Grade II listed 19th century oast house, which together house an impressive collection of Kent related agricultural and rural objects dating from 18th – 20th century.

The museum relies on a dedicated group of volunteers and trustees to run and manage day-to-day activity. It opens to the public annually during the summer months (May - September).

About the Project

- In January 2024 the museum secured a grant of **£13,843** from the Association of Independent Museums (AIM) to run the oral history project: 'Local Stories: Memories of Hopping around Brook and Wye, Kent' with support from a range of local organisations, including Wye Historical Society. This project is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.
- The aim of this project is to recruit and train a group of student volunteers to collect, share and preserve audio recordings of local peoples' memories associated with the experience of hop picking and farming in and around Brook and Wye, Kent.
- The recordings will provide a personal, local and emotive insight into the history of hop farming in Kent as well as accessible content for use in exhibitions, learning activities and digital engagement.
- The recordings will be archived with the University of Kent Special Collections and Archives for future use.
- The project will conclude in late 2024 with a new and innovative oral history exhibition showcasing the findings from the project. The exhibition will be hosted at the University of Kent Templeman Library in Canterbury, before moving to Brook Rural Museum in 2025.

if you would like to find out more, or share your own memories about hopping around Brook and Wye, please get in touch at: engagement@brookruralmuseum.org.uk / 07555144068

A History of the Oil Depot, Bramble Lane, Wye.

Most of you reading this will be aware that, until it became the Havillands Place housing development, there was a disused oil depot on that site off Bramble Lane, built during World War II. Paul Burnham's recently published book 'Discovering Roman Wye' (available from the Society at £10.00) tells of the evidence of a Roman settlement there nearly two millennia ago, but the pressures of war and secrecy meant that no account was taken of that historic use when the oil depot was constructed in 1943. To understand why an oil depot ever existed in rural Wye, we need to understand the background.

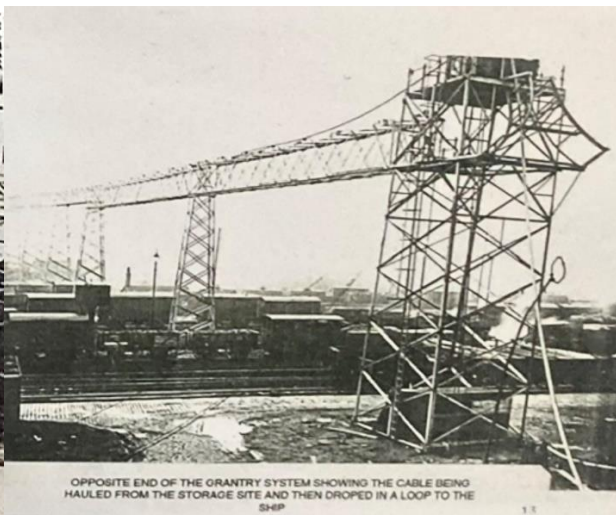
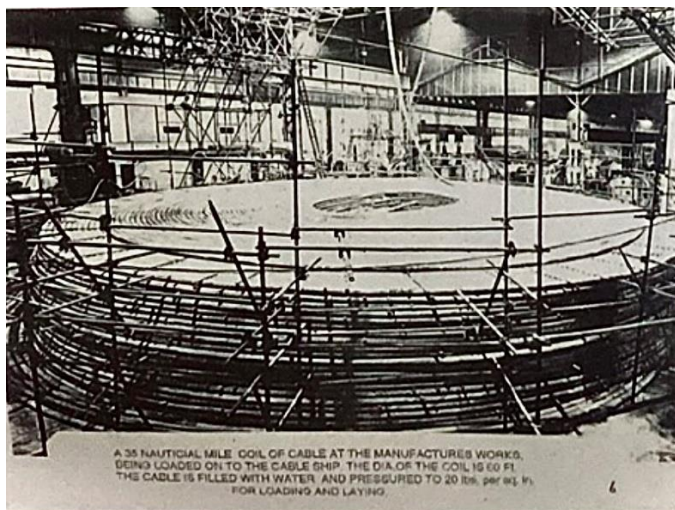
With the benefit of hindsight, it is plain to see that Germany's fate was sealed as early as 1941. In June that year, Hitler ignored his non-aggression pact with Russia and invaded to obtain control of their resources, principally oil, of which Germany had no supply of its own. When Japan attacked Pearl Harbour that December dragging America into the war, the German Axis powers could not win against the Allies with our overwhelming advantage in both manpower and industrial resources.

Churchill realised that unless joint American and British strategies could be agreed, there could be chaos without common priorities. At the January 1943 Casablanca Conference Roosevelt was persuaded that success against Japan in the Pacific was a secondary objective and that total victory against Hitler in Europe was paramount. Stalin pressed continuously for a second front in Europe and whilst both Britain and America sent Russia material support (to which Ashford Railway Works contributed), the agreed strategy was to drive the Germans from North Africa first, thus keeping control of the Suez Canal and Britain's supply route to our Empire open, only then invading mainland Italy after capturing Sicily. The relative weakness of the Italian forces meant that Hitler was forced to divert precious resources first to N Africa then to Italy, but all to no avail.

Churchill was adamant that we would not be ready to mount a full-scale invasion of northern Europe until 1944. Eventually the D-Day landings took place in Normandy in June that year, after months of building up American supplies of men, weaponry and materiel in the South of England and a very successful deception campaign to keep the Germans guessing where the landings would take place.

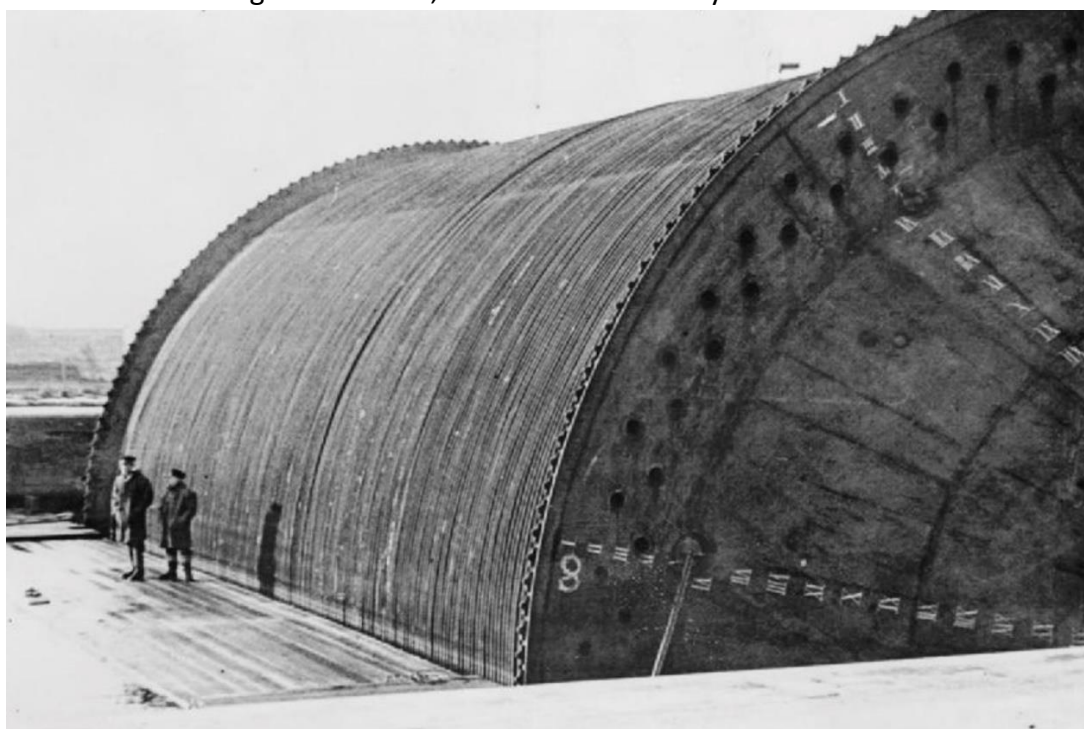
Long before D-Day, military planners could see that there would be a need for vast quantities of vehicle and aircraft fuels and lubricants from the earliest beachhead on the Continent until the war was won - and beyond. American General Omar Bradley is quoted as saying that Napoleon's famous dictum "an army marches on its stomach" needed revision, since even then an infantry division needed six tons of petrol (or as he said, gasoline) for every ton of food.

Pipelines under the sea were the answer. Engineering companies were encouraged to design and test submersible pressurised piping and contracts were awarded for multiple pipes at two crossing points. One (code-named 'Bambi') was planned from the Isle of Wight to the Cherbourg peninsula and the other ('Dumbo') from Dungeness (actually Greatstone) to Ambleteuse, a village beside Boulogne. The former was over a much longer distance so had to operate at a higher pressure. It was plagued by mishaps (such as an accident with a ship's anchor) and never worked reliably - and in any case it was too far west. But the Greatstone facility was on-stream by September 1944, three months after the D-Day landings, and it pumped immense quantities of fuels and lubricants, with underground pipelines being laid behind the Allies' steady advance across mainland Europe. By the end of the war there were 17 active pipes from Greatstone to France and were codenamed as 'PLUTO' for Pipeline Underwater Transport of Oil, popularly understood to be 'Pipe Lines Under the Ocean'.



Images from the excellent permanent display at Brenzett Aeronautical Museum which we recommend.

The pipes were laid in a number of ways, one from new-fangled ships with rotating reels of continuous pipeline which they dropped directly to the sea bed, another where one type of piping could be coiled in the hold of a barge and laid directly from its stern, another from giant cotton-reel shaped floating drums named 'conundrums' (pictured below). The job of hauling the heavy pipes uphill onto the shore in France was handled, believe it or not, by a static steam ploughing machine on the beach in Boulogne's harbour, which was eventually selected as the destination.



A Conundrum loaded with pipework prior to flotation.

Apparently only 8% of the fuel and lubricants used up to Germany's capitulation had come through the PLUTO network and whilst that is a small proportion, the early tests in the UK so encouraged the allied decision-makers that it gave confidence that the invasion was feasible. There was great nervousness that over-reliance on tanker ships would be a problem since port facilities on the other side of the channel were likely to be destroyed and approaches blocked as the Germans retreated, and air attacks rendered ships particularly vulnerable.

So where did the Wye Depot fit into the picture? In 1942 heavy bombing of Germany was in its infancy, losses were heavy and accuracy dreadful. But with the Battle of Britain won, the RAF was increasingly aggressive in taking the war to occupied France using light bombers like the Blenheim, with fighters protecting them and roaming the North of France seeking so-called targets of opportunity. Whilst this had no great impact on the German war effort it did at least keep squadrons of their fighters away from the Russian front. But fighters are small aircraft with limited range – a factor to our advantage overhead in the Battle of Britain, but increasingly disadvantageous the further we penetrated into Europe. More and more airfields were needed as close to France as possible. That need continued right to the end of the war as we needed to intercept and destroy bombers and from June 1944 (coincidental with D-Day), to shoot down Germany's new V1 'Doodlebug' flying bombs.

To supply these Kent airfields, a distribution centre of underground tanks for aviation fuel and oil was built for the RAF in 1943 at Wye, exactly where the Havillands Place development now stands. Grass airfields were created on level farmland as forward bases known as Advanced Landing Grounds (ALGs) at Brenzett, Great Chart, Egerton (confusingly known as Headcorn), High Halden, Kingsnorth, Lashenden (at Headcorn), Lydd, Newchurch, New Romney (2 airfields), Staplehurst and Woodchurch, in addition to the established Central and East Kent airfields of West Malling, Detling, Hawkinge, Lympe and Manston.



The Wye Oil Depot team c1944

The Bramble Lane facility was next to the railway line, where separate sidings were built. There were 4 x 500 ton aviation and vehicle fuel tanks and 4 x 160 ton oil tanks, still intact in 2001 when the site was sold for development. The tanks were not visible, but buried beneath earth mounds as protection against bombing and as camouflage.

Demand for aviation fuels and lubricants grew rapidly and Wye resident Johnny Morris remembers both RAF and American tankers using the depot. It seems the depot could be supplied by pipeline, road or rail (vulnerable to air attack) but distribution was largely by road, with RAF and American tankers being filled from a four-bay overhead gantry.

There were brick built offices at the frontage and the staff lived in huts on land opposite, which is now Bramble Close. The whole site was guarded by a stout metal fence with outward curving pointed tips to deter any intruders, which existed until the site was bought at auction. The nightwatchman's name was Will Robinson, who is doubtless in the photograph above of the entire staff. Given that there would be a large number normally dressed in overalls rather than their 'Sunday best', maybe the picture was taken around VE Day, or as the site was closed?



A postwar photo of the Wye Oil Depot

The reason for Wye's connection to the Pluto network (which is described as brief) is not clear. It may have been for receiving supplies, to augment the flow through Dungeness, or merely as a reserve to be used in an emergency. The map on the front page from a 1944 publication clearly shows that it was connected, but after the war the whole scheme became unnecessary and the pipeline was stripped up, as the metals used in its construction were valuable in postwar Britain.

All pipelines were walked regularly to check for any leaks visible above ground. Details are hazy as to the alignment of the pipeline to the Wye depot, but we know that this was waymarked by distinctive stile structures at field edges to mark the alignment and prevent the pipes being accidentally damaged. There are very few remaining stiles but we believe the concrete posts of one can be seen on the left maybe 100 yds from the level crossing as you leave Wye for Kemp's Corner, just beyond the field entrance on the other side of the road.

The alignment of the pipeline beyond Wye is uncertain but its direction must have been more or less due south.

If any reader is aware of anything that can be added to our knowledge of the oil depot, particularly the alignment of the pipe connecting it to the PLUTO network, please make contact through our website.

Alan Paterson

SOCIETY MATTERS

WYE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING WILL BE HELD AT 7.15 PM ON
WEDNESDAY 6 MARCH 2024 AT THE LADY JOANNA THORNHILL SCHOOL, WYE**

AGENDA

The President will welcome members to the meeting.

- 1. Apologies for Absence**
- 2. To approve the Minutes of the last AGM held on Wednesday 1 March 2023.**
- 3. Matters arising from the Minutes**
- 4. Secretary's Annual Report**
- 5. To approve the Hon Treasurer's Annual Accounts**
- 6. Election of Officers**

The Revd John Makey is Honorary President of the Society and continues in office.

The Chair, Secretary and Treasurer are appointed to serve for one year.

The Acting Chair (Alan Paterson) was appointed after the last AGM and is standing for election as Chair. The Secretary (Jonathan Timms) and Treasurer (Anna Clark) offer themselves for re-election. Any further nominations for Officers must be proposed and seconded by members with the consent of the individuals proposed and received in writing by the Acting Chair or Secretary by 20 February 2024.

7. Election of the Executive Committee.

Members of the Executive Committee are elected in rotation to serve for two years.

The following members of the Executive Committee were elected at the 2023 AGM and continue in office for a further year. Cilla Deeks, Rosie Fletcher, Ellie Morris and Margaret Bray.

Maureen de Saxe was elected to the Executive Committee in 2022 and offers herself for re-election for a further two years. David Perkins was appointed to the Executive Committee after the last AGM and offers himself for election for a further two years.

Any further nominations for members of the Executive Committee must be proposed and seconded by members with the consent of the individuals nominated and must be received in writing by the Acting Chair before this AGM

8. Any Other Business at the discretion of the Chair.

Contact details are as follows: Chair: email fieldbank@btinternet.com. Telephone 01233 812740

Secretary: email ijnitjims@gmail.com. Telephone 07986 603129.

Draft Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of Wye Historical Society

Held at 7.15pm on Wednesday 1 March 2023

At the Lady Joanna Thornhill School, Wye

The AGM was attended by 43 members and 5 visitors. Members were welcomed by the President, the Reverend John Makey, who explained that Tim Betts was standing down as Chair because of other commitments. As no nominations had been received, Tim had agreed to continue as Acting Chair until the last meeting of the season on 5 April 2023. The President then handed over the conduct of the meeting to the Acting Chair.

1. Apologies for Absence. Apologies have been received from Paul Burnham, Anna Clark, Anne Findlay, Sally Leaver and Ellie Morris.

2. The Minutes of the last AGM held on Wednesday 2 March 2022 were approved.
(Proposed by Margaret Bray, Seconded by Cilla Deeks)

3. Matters arising from the Minutes. There were no matters arising.

4. The Secretary's Annual Report. Noted.

5. The Hon Treasurer's Report and Financial Statement. Approved
(Proposed by Jonathan Timms, Seconded by Rosie Fletcher)

6. Election of Officers

The Reverend John Makey, Honorary President of the Society, continues in office. No other nominations having been received:

Anna Clark was re-elected as Treasurer to serve for a further year.

(Proposed by Maureen de Saxe and Seconded by Ellie Morris).

Jonathan Timms was re-elected as Secretary to serve for a further year.

(Proposed by Margaret Bray and Seconded by Rosie Fletcher).

7. Election of the Executive Committee.

Maureen de Saxe continues in office for a further year.

No other nominations having been received:

Cilla Deeks was re-elected to serve for a further two years.

(Proposed by Tim Betts and Seconded by Rosie Fletcher).

Rosie Fletcher was re-elected to serve for a further two years.

(Proposed by Anna Clark and Seconded by Maureen de Saxe).

Ellie Morris was re-elected to serve for a further two years.

(Proposed by Jonathan Timms and Seconded by Margaret Bray).

Margaret Bray was re-elected to serve for a further two years.

(Proposed by Graham Bradley and Seconded by Ellie Morris).

8. Any Other Business at the discretion of the Chair. There being no other business, the meeting closed at 7.25pm and was followed by "The Museum at Quex House: An Illustrated Talk" by Hazel Basford.