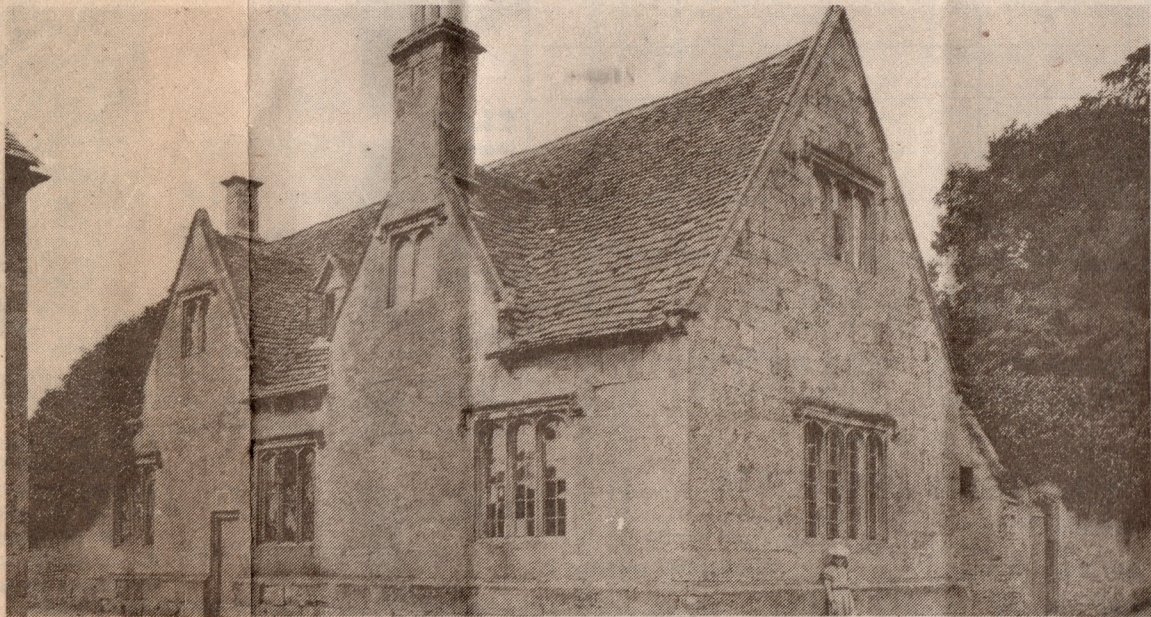


Original
reason
for the
festival

**The Old Grammar
School which is cele-
brating its 350th anni-
versary this year — the
initial reason for the
Bampton Festival.**



Celebration of the past and present

By JACKIE DAY

Janet Newman didn't know what she was letting herself in for when she volunteered to help organise the Bampton Festival.

Now her house is littered with hundreds of old photographs, dozens of examples of village memorabilia and a shopping bag full of human bones!

Human bones? "Yes" says Janet enthusiastically. "The bag contains the skeleton of a five or six-year-old child. I'm hoping to get a doctor friend to reconstruct the skull for display during the festival."

If she succeeds, the skull will be one of the more unusual exhibits at the week-long festival — a grisly reminder of Bampton's past.

It was found earlier this year during building work in an area near The Pieces. At first everyone thought they had stumbled across evidence of a recent murder until more skeletons were dug up and identified as being between 1,600 and 2,000 years old, the remains of an early settlement.

The festival, heralded as a celebration of Bampton past and present, is on from July 13 to July 20 and offers an ambitious and varied programme of events.

Concerts, talks, exhibitions, old photographs, a garden contest, morris dancing, music — it will all be going on during the week.

The festival actually started out as a celebration of the 350th anniversary of the founding of the village grammar school, now the library.

But the idea soon snowballed to embrace all aspects of village life and the organisers have been busy since last November setting up the programme.

It's just as well that the focus is not all on the grammar school for the establishment did not enjoy a very distinguished reputation.

It was set up with a £300 donation left by local woollen merchant Robert Vesey in 1635. But because of various delays including the Civil War it did not get built until 1653.

Then apparently, it was run on a shoestring budget, attracted rotten teachers and a rotten reputation. Things picked up under a later long-serving headmaster, but went downhill again when his wife died and he turned to drink.

The place was closed around the turn of the century and became a grain store before being used as a library. "You could say now is its heyday," said Janet Newman. "Its present is a lot better than its past."

In the old school during the festival there will be an exhibition of paintings and art work by children from Aston and Bampton Primary Schools, showing Bampton's history from pre-historic times to the First World War.

Bampton is, of course, widely known for its morris dancing and folk music traditions and these will be amply reflected during the week.

On Tuesday, July 16, well-known enthusiast Roy Dommett will be giving a talk on morris dancing in the village and showing his cine films of the dancers dating from the 1930s.

And on Friday, July 19, there will be a folk night with Len and Barbara Berry performing some of the old songs which were collected in the village by Cecil Sharp.

The festival ends in fitting folksy style on Saturday, July 20, with a barn dance and barbecue in the Market Square.

Since the festival planning started, villagers have been urged to root around in their attics for old photographs and relics of the past.

Another of the organisers, Karen Cowan, said: "It's been marvellous the way people have come forward with bits and pieces. We have gathered together a fascinating collection."

The collection includes about 600 old photographs — a few of which we have borrowed for these pages. They will be on display, along with an exhibition of memorabilia, in the Old Primary School throughout the week.

Other exhibitions include The Treasures of Bampton Parish — it's on at the Arts Centre and is a rare opportunity to see documents, maps, decorative truncheons and other treasures normally kept in museums, bank vaults and archives.

At Kilmore House there will be an exhibition of 350 years of needle and thread with many of the pieces coming from private collections. Each afternoon the West Oxfordshire Lacemakers will give demonstrations.

Oxford don, Dr John Blair, is setting up a display in St Mary's Church to show what the early church building looked like.

He is also giving a lecture on Monday, July 15, on his discovery of St Boernwald, a previously unknown saint, buried in St Mary's.

Also in the church will be a display of vestments, a floral display and a peal of bells will open the festival on Saturday, July 13.

Bampton's architecture also comes

under the festival spotlight with a lecture tour by Geoffrey Tyack. The tour will include Ham Court, now a farm, which is all that remains of Bampton Castle, built in 1314.

It will also take in Weald Manor, built in the 1740s and the Deanery, another early building.

There will also be a talk on the conservation of historic buildings from Daryl Fowler with emphasis on the special problems presented by old Cotswold stone houses.

On Sunday, July 14, the public will have the chance to visit 15 of Bampton's finest gardens, including the famous five-acre garden at Bampton Manor.

And continuing the garden theme, there is to be a front garden competition judged by Candia Lycett-Green, author of *The Front Garden*.

There is also a talk on the history of English gardens from Penelope Doxat in the village hall on Tuesday, July 16.

On a musical note there will be a Glyndebourne style open air concert at The Deanery on Saturday, July 13, with the London opera group, Opera Integra.

And on Wednesday, July 17, organist Simon Gutteridge will give a recital in St Mary's Church.

Throughout the week pubs and restaurants will be open to cater for visitors and the organisers have set up a festival office in the Town Hall where tickets for all the events can be bought.

Souvenirs and publications can also be bought from there with all profits going to various local charities.

A full programme of events is available. The office number is Bampton Castle 850873 or Janet Newman can be contacted on Bampton Castle 850755.