



February 2021

Dear WARG Members,

Maureen has been very busy arranging talks for the next few months so here is the update for your diaries. You will find more in depth information and details of all talks, at the end of this flyer and at [warg.org.uk](http://warg.org.uk) As you will see we have home grown talent among our speakers and we hope to repeat the record attendances we have had to date.

**Monday, 8 March**

**"Stanford in the Vale, a hidden past revealed"** by our very own David Ashby, BA(Hons), MRes, Project Director, Stanford in the Vale Archaeological Research Project

**Monday, 12 April**

**"A true Victorian Company, the story of Joseph Bull and Sons, Builders"** by Steve Old, our WARG Chairman. See the website publications page.

**Monday 10 May "Medieval Building Myths - the folklore and archaeology of medieval buildings"** by James Wright, FSA, Archaeological Consultant, Triskele Heritage

**Summer Programme** – Maureen writes:-

With uncertainty still surrounding the timing of any relaxation of lockdown restrictions, we are looking at additional talks to replace outings. Any suggestions for speakers or topics of special interest would be very welcome. Just email Maureen at [Secretary@warg.org.uk](mailto:Secretary@warg.org.uk).

## **A Warm Lollipop for Bone Chilling February**

*'Speak low if you speak love'*

*(Much Ado About Nothing – Act 2, Scene 1)*

February is seasonally a very dismal month with winter not yet over and Spring not yet arrived, and it inevitably has an effect on our health and outlook. Even the beautiful blue sunny days and the sharp snow covered ones are short lived, with just a glimmer of increasing extra daylight. As I write this it is very woggy (wet and foggy), and how many of us, in this continuing strange time are longing for those kisses and cuddles so openly bestowed by distant grandchildren and even the bigger ones when they forget the need to 'look cool', or that they have been 'banged up' with you for months. (One of my small granddaughters does the 'exploding heart' hand signal another just cuddles the phone – usually cutting us off!)

Perhaps this is a reason to celebrate St. Valentine's Day, when a little extra tender loving care is very welcome.

So – why St. Valentine of all the communion of saints? And why February 14<sup>th</sup>? Was this an attempt to Christianise a Pagan festival, like Saturnalia and Christmas?

The Roman fertility festival of Lupercalia was on the Ides of February, which in that month was 15<sup>th</sup>. It took place at the cave where Romulus and Remus were said to have been suckled by a she wolf. There is a beautiful bronze of this in the Museo Capitolino in Rome.

Lupercalia derives from *lupus* and *calidus*, which could be interpreted as a ‘warm puppy’, or a ‘hot wolf’, as this festival was a fairly violent event, with the sacrifice of small animals to the fertility gods. A goat’s hide was cut into strips and dipped in blood, before the fun began.

The Lupercali, the ‘best men’, ran naked through the streets whipping the women they met with the strips of shaggy hide. I guess many ladies might have decided to take a walk that day, but don’t try this at home, it is likely to get you locked up! On the rationale of fertility, this was supposed to promote pregnancy and guarantee an easy delivery. However, it does beg the question as to how much contribution was made by the whipping and how much might be the resultant activity of the participants!

Later, as the legend goes, the young women would place their names in a box. The bachelors would then draw names and would be paired with those women for the following year. A precursor of the ‘dating app’ maybe?

The earliest historical record of the Lupercalia is from the 3rd century BCE, lasting until the end of the 5th century CE. Around this time Pope Gelasius I<sup>st</sup> created a day for Saint Valentine, but it is unclear if the Romans practiced their usual diplomacy and incorporated it into a Pagan festival day, as the earliest record of St.

Valentine’s day is actually from the 14<sup>th</sup> century CE.

So who was Valentine? This is uncertain as there are a number of saints who share this name. Roman Catholicism recognises St. Valentine of Rome, a person who died around 270 CE, beheaded for helping Christians to marry. But he may be a conflation of various people called Valentinus.

Officially he is a very busy saint having wide responsibilities from epilepsy to bee keeping, as well as for lovers and marriage. He is busier than ever at present as he also oversees plague, but must be less busy on the travel front.

For the invention of St. Valentine's day, we may have Geoffrey Chaucer to thank, as in *'Parliament of Foules'*, 1375, he links courtly love with the celebration of Valentine's feast day. *'For this was sent on Seynt Valentyne's day when every foul cometh ther to choose his mate'*.

As for the sending of cards, chocolates and flowers, the earliest surviving romantic Valentine missive has a French origin. Written by Charles, Duke of Orleans while imprisoned in the Tower of London, after being captured during the Battle of Agincourt in 1415, he wrote his wife, Bonne of Armagnac, this love poem which, several times, repeats phrases using "Valentine" as a term of endearment:

*Je suis desja d'amour tanné  
Ma tres douce Valentinée*

*Trans. "I am already sick of love,  
My very gentle Valentine"*

Sadly, the Duke's wife died before receiving these words of love from her imprisoned husband and today his words reside in the British Library.

Also in the British Library is the earliest known English language example of a Valentine. Dating to February 1477. The love letter was written by Margery Brews to her fiancé John Paston. Margery refers to John as her "*right well-beloved Valentine*" and beseeches him to marry her despite the fact she hasn't been able to convince her father to increase her dowry! Was this the beginning of the tradition of women proposing to men on Valentine's day? Good news – the couple did go on to marry.

Modesty alert – you may wish to avert your eyes from the following paragraph.

Be careful to whom you send chocolate in case you are sending the wrong message, as it has been considered an aphrodisiac food since the time of the Aztecs. It contains two chemicals that are linked to arousal, tryptophan, one of the building blocks of serotonin, a brain chemical involved in arousal, and phenylethylamine, a stimulant related to amphetamines which are released in the brain when people fall in love. In olden days, this resulted in the tradition in European royalty to give their lovers chocolates mixed with amber to create fiery energy and stimulate their love.

As for roses, they were said to be the favourite flower of Venus, goddess of love, as she believed they signified strong feelings. A little less aggressive message.

So even if you are only buying a box of chocolates to brighten your own day, Spring flowers are already showing their colours, and no excuse is needed to buy or gather some for yourself. They do not even have to be roses.



Have a good day and stay warm and safe.

Janet.  
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Ref: Laura Betzig, Ph.D., Psychology Today 14/02/2012 online 27/1/21

<https://www.scrapbook.com/articles/valentine-history>

## **Summary of the next three talks.**

**Monday, 8 March "Stanford in the Vale, a hidden past revealed" by David Ashby, BA(Hons), MRes, Project Director, Stanford in the Vale Archaeological Research Project**

This talk will examine the archaeological and historical evidence which has been revealed for the development of the village of Stanford in the Vale, Oxfordshire from its earliest origins in the Mesolithic period through to the formation of a town in the medieval period to the modern village it is today. The majority of the new archaeological and historical evidence for Stanford in the Vale has been gathered through fieldwork undertaken as part of the Stanford in the Vale Archaeological Research Project which commenced in 2008 and continues to the present day.

**Monday, 12 April "A true Victorian Company, the story of Joseph Bull and Sons, Builders" by Steve Old, Chairman WARG**

The story of the rise and demise of one of Victorian Britain's most successful building companies, starting in Southampton but building all over Britain, and even the Empire, including many in Winchester.

**Monday 10 May**

**"Medieval Building Myths - the folklore and archaeology of medieval buildings" by James Wright, FSA, Archaeological Consultant, Triskele Heritage**

Historic buildings specialists often meet owners and custodians who are eager to talk about their properties and their enthusiasm is genuinely infectious. We can learn so much of value about a society by what it builds. However romanticised and elaborated stories often grow up around certain features in medieval buildings - secret passages, swordsmen fighting on spiral staircases, and more.

It is surprising how often these get repeated all across the country and at so many different structures. In this talk, award-winning buildings archaeologist, James Wright, will outline some of the legends, look at the origins of the stories and reveal the underlying truths behind the tales.