

WHILTON LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

OUTING TO TOWCESTER MUSEUM

On Friday 17th July the Local History Society had an outing to Towcester Museum, organised by Brian Melling, our treasurer and a volunteer at the museum. We were impressed by the quality of the museum, which has recently won an award, and by the welcome given by volunteers who attended our meeting.

Because Towcester was a Roman settlement (Lactodorum) and was on the Watling Street, now known as the A5, our visit concentrated on Roman times. We were given an interesting and amusing talk by which corrected many of our false assumptions about the Romans, their army and their roads. We learned that it was the army, not slaves, who built the roads, and that the modern route through Towcester is not the old Roman way. In fact the Roman road went straight through the site of the modern museum. With the fall of the empire, the settlement was abandoned and houses fell in over the old road, so that later buildings followed the new alignment we recognise today.

We saw a model of Roman Towcester, as it may have been; this small town was probably similar to the Roman settlement of Bannaventa in Whilton. Both would have been staging posts on the main road or "via publica". We heard that at these places there might have been a choice between staying in the very exclusive "mansio", or the friendly "tavern", or taking the dubious flea-ridden option of the cheap lodging house.

There were 300,000 miles of roads in the Roman Empire, which helps to explain why they were so successful in governing most of the known western world for centuries.

The museum provides information and exhibits of other periods of history too, inspiring us to think about returning on another occasion.