

S.A.L.H.S

website: www.salhs.org.uk

Stanstead Abbotts Local History Society

Issue 15

Editor—Terry Collins

Hidden Hertfordshire

July 2015

Our May speaker, following the AGM, was Anne Marie Parker with her thoroughly enjoyable talk on the subject of 'Hidden Hertfordshire'.

She began by asking what made the county so popular through the ages, and the answers were, its proximity to London, its good North/South roads, but not so good East to West, its rivers like the Lea, Ver and Colne.. Although it is the sixth smallest county in area it has a population of over one million. It has no great features but a secret landscape.

Anne mentioned a number of villages, some dating from the Domesday book that have been used in films and on calendars, such as Westmill, Aldbury and Ashwell. All of the talk was accompanied by some excellent photographs.

Another reason why the county became popular was the excellent road system across the county which began in the prehistoric era with the Icknield Way running between Royston and Tring, this was followed by the Roman Ermine Street running from London to Lincoln., and Watling Street which passed through St Albans, which by the Middle Ages had become a place of pilgrimage. In the 18th Century a number of Hertfordshire towns had become stopping places on the coaching route between London and the North. Today of course we have the M1, M25 and the A1M motorways.

Next we were shown some of the lesser known places where these roads take us. To Royston caves for instance. This 'cave' below the junction of Ermine Street and the Icknield way was discovered in 1742 by accident when a workman found a millstone while digging the foundation of a new bench in the Butter Market. It is



not a natural cave but is man made, although its original use is not known. It may have been a burial chamber, as bones and a skull were found in it, or a secret chapel, possibly used by the Knights Templar before their dissolution in 1312. It is best known for its wall carvings which feature figures of at least 4 saints, including St Christopher and St Catherine. It is not known who did these carvings or exactly when they were made, although the cave predates the Medieval period, but they made have been made in the 13th or 14th century.

We then moved to Waltham Cross and the Eleanor Cross. This is one of only three remaining crosses from the

twelve erected to mark the path of the body of Queen Eleanor, wife of Edward I, on its journey from Lincoln to Westminster Avenue. The original cross was erected between 1290 and 1294 and has been re-erected three times since 1832. The original sculptures have been removed and are now in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Another item we were shown was a 19th Century coal post, of which there are a number throughout the county including Wormley Woods. Coal posts were introduced to mark the area, a radius of 20 miles from London, inside which a tax on coal was payable. They were introduced from 1861 but within 30 years they became obsolete.

We took a quick look at the HSBC bank building in Ware, which on closer examination can be seen to be two medieval buildings linked together. One of the them was the White Hart Inn, the original home of the Great Bed of Ware and one of Ware's 25 inns.

Ashridge House and Estate on the West of the county has the beautiful countryside of the Chilterns to offer with lots of walking trails with wildlife including Fallow deer, Red Kites, and Nightingales. Although the house is not open to the public it can be seen from some of the footpaths and is a Grade 1 listed building and a fine example of neo Gothic architecture.

After answering questions Anne was thanked for an excellent evening.

Terry Collins

St James Church.

The June meeting took place away from the Parish Hall as members met at St James for a guided talk by Jonathon Trower, who is now the High Sheriff of Hertfordshire. We all gathered inside the church to hear from him the history of this lovely old building.

It is believed that there has been a church on the site since Saxon times, as it is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 that there was a priest in Stanstead Abbott, but the present building dates, in part, from the 12th Century. The location of the church has been a matter of speculation for a great many years. Legend has it that the villagers wanted the church at the bottom of the hill where their cottages, etc. were located, and that is where they began to build it. Every morning however they would find that all their work for the day had been moved to the top of the hill, where it now stands. Some blamed the devil for this but it was also blamed on the monks of Waltham Abbey, as they became lords of the manor of Stanstead at about the same time. A more likely

explanation for the church's position is that it is thought there was a Roman encampment on the site and the church was built there.

As time passed however and the River Lea grew in importance as a means of transporting goods to London the village began to grow



in the valley at the foot of the hill, although a few cottages and the manor house, 'the Bury' remained at the top. By the year 1200 the monks of Waltham possessed the lordship of the manor and another religious body, the monks at Merton in Surrey possessed the right to provide for and appoint a priest. This position remained until 1531 when Henry VIII acquired the

manor, he gave it to Anne Boleyn in 1532 and she kept it until her death four years later when it reverted to the Crown.

By 1566 it had been transferred to Edward Baeshe who was 'General Surveyor of the Victuals for the Royal Navy and Marine Affairs'. The lordship of the manor remained in the Baeshe family until 1676, during which time the North, or Baeshe chapel, was erected in 1577. It then passed to the Fields family until the early nineteenth century when the estate was split up. The Jocelyn family acquired Stansteadbury and the patronage and living for the church was passed eventually to W.R. Thomas in 1847.

Thomas Fowell Buxton acquired the lordship of the manor together with the patronage of the church in 1866. He was a brewer and the family were part of the Truman Hanbury and Buxton group. He was also responsible for the building of St Andrew's church in 1881 and the village school and Parish hall. The Buxton family retain the lordship of the manor but transferred the patronage of the living to the Peache Trustees, in the early part

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AGM 2015

Our May meeting was the date for the SALHS third AGM.

Chairman Ian White got the proceedings going with his annual report. He began by reminding the audience how well the Society was doing as we were only in our 3rd year and had a membership in excess of 100, which, when compared with towns like Hertford and Ware, whose comparable society had less than half that number.

He mentioned the range of topics that we had covered during the past year, from the Buntingford Line to the men from the village who gave

their lives in the Great War.

In the village we have cleaned the War Memorial for the anniversary of the outbreak of the war and placed a bench in the Meadow in memory of our first secretary Charlie Lovick.

In a more light hearted mood our Quiz Night raised over £500 for the Society and our Christmas Social evening, was livened up by songs from Lynne Heraud and Pat Turner and music by Rob and Beth Gifford, and we hope to repeat these at our next Festive party. Finally he mentioned the range of

anniversaries coming up in the next year, from the crowning of King Harold in 1066 to the battle of the Somme in 1916.

The treasurers report showed that we had over £4000 in our bank account and that we had sold over 340 copies of Ron Dale's book.

Special thanks were given to Brian Johnson for his splendid work maintaining our ever growing website, and to Terry Collins for his quarterly newsletter.

Finally all the committee members were re-elected unanimously for another year.

Terry Collins

Markets and Market Towns in Medieval Hertfordshire

Our July speaker was Mark Bailey from the University of East Anglia and he began his talk by looking at the reasons for the rise of markets in medieval England.

He said that the rise in commercialisation in England in the 12th and 13th Centuries between the Domesday Book and the Black Death led to a form of industrialisation. The reasons for this were;

1. Within Common Law the introduction of Civil Pleas and Litigation
2. Courts enabling legal action to be taken.
3. Standardised Weights and Measures.
4. The Rise of Trade Guilds

At the same time agricultural industry improved and transport also became easier as peasants were able to use horses rather than oxen.

Bridges replaced fords as the means to cross rivers, often built by local initiatives, such as the bridge

at Ware built by the Earl of Leicester. By imposing tolls on many of these bridges money was raised which could assist the local economy. The use of existing Roman roads also improved transportation. The use of waterways as a means of



transport grew when it was realized that it was cheaper than going overland.

By the year 1350 there were over 2000 weekly markets in England together with 2500 seasonal fairs. The

right to hold a market was granted by the local landowners but the King authorised them. All were granted a market 'charter', some of which still exist.

Many Hertfordshire towns held markets and fairs but not Stanstead Abbots even though it had 7 burgesses, but Stanstead St Margaret's held a weekly market on Thursday and had an annual fair every June. Other local towns with important markets included Buntingford, Standon, Hertford, Royston and St Albans.

In most of the towns where they were held the markets tended to be held in an area through which travellers would have to pass. In Buntingford for example it was at the junction of both the North-South and the East-West roads. In Standon the area where the market was held can still be seen although now it is more like the village green. *Continued on Page 4*

Life's Little Problems: Where Is Stanstead Abbots?

Before my legs retired I used to often walk down Cappell Lane. Usually this was to reach the old Buntingford railway line at the hump back bridge, when on my way to one of my favourite walks up the Ash valley and around Easneye. Now, when walking down Cappell Lane I knew that somewhere was an invisible dividing line which meant that I had crossed into Hollycross Road and that sooner or later I would actually be in Ware and not Stanstead Abbots. Now I may be weird and I can concede this point, but I do like to know which town or village I am in. (By the way I still believe that Hollycross Road was meant to be Hollycross Road as the canons of Waltham Abbey were once the village owners). Life is full of prob-

lems is it not? Sometimes such minutiae can spoil a simple walk down Cappell Lane.

It seems to me that when in the Easneye Woods, on crossing over the Ash to Watersplace Farm and onwards to Widbury Hill, that I am no longer in Stanstead Abbots once again. I believe the river Ash tumbling downhill from Wareside is roughly the boundary line. The Saxons often used rivers for boundary lines and thus we have the Ash between Stanstead and Ware; the Stort being the boundary line between us and Roydon and also between Hertfordshire and Essex; and the Lea divides us from St. Margaret's and Great Amwell. We are bounded on three sides by rivers with the Mill Stream coursing through the village centre under the Red Lion round-

bout, through the Maltings and out again into the Lea. Additionally, thanks to earlier gravel workings, we have three fishing lakes in Marsh Lane and a sailing Lake, plus an excellent fishing lake accessed by the Town Mead (the Amwell Lake). To cap all this, we also have the Rye Meads and the RSPB nature reserve which is absolutely full of water. We are indeed a very watery village. Stanstead Abbots stretches beyond Rye House as far as the Stort which joins the Lea at Feildes Weir and if you have not been to the weir, it is worth a visit. It is a masterpiece of water engineering. But I still don't know where Cappell Lane becomes Hollycross Road! And I hate wandering around the village in a state of perpetual confusion.

Ron Dale

St James Church - Contd.

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of the 20th century.. The church is now in the hands of the Churches Conservation Trust which was set up in 1969 to preserve those churches no longer needed for worship but which are of historical and architectural importance.

At the end of Mr. Trower's talk he was thanked by Chairman Ian White for a most enlightening and entertaining evening, and then most of us gathered for a glass of refreshment outside the church.

Terry Collins



Markets and Market Towns - Contd.

Continued from Page 3

Existing towns in England grew in size and there were 4000 new towns in the country by the end of the 14th Century and as a result the population density increased. All towns were subject to a feudal overlord who, in turn, answered to the King. There were three types of market town, Royal Boroughs, the only one in Hertfordshire is the county town, Hertford. Secondly there were Mesne boroughs where the lord retained control and ran the markets, e.g. St Albans, and finally Manorial market towns which had no burgesses or urban institutions e.g. Royston.

By the year 1340 there were 36 market franchises in the county. The population had increased so that there were 12 taxpayers per square mile and more than 20% of the population lived in towns, the largest in the county being St Albans.

Then came the Black Death in 1348/49 during which 40% of the population died and did not recover for over two centuries. When the sickness finally ended the shortage of workers meant that there was an

increase in wealth per capita as an age of consumerism entered with the average person able to buy more goods as a result of higher wages. And in addition new industries began to spring up across the country.

At the same time however the number of markets began to contract, by the year 1500 two thirds of the markets founded by 1350 no longer existed. Also pockets of urban decay and decline began to appear.

This is only an abridged version of Mark's extremely interesting and educational talk, after which he was kind enough to answer a number of questions before being warmly thanked by Chairman Ian White.

Terry Collins

Data Protection Act

In accordance with the above act we have to advise that the Society holds information on computer in respect of each member. This information is used for routine membership purposes only and remains confidential.

Forthcoming events

August Sunday 16th	BBQ - Members Only.
September Friday 11th	Julian Grenfell - Hertfordshire's WW1 Poet by HALS
October Friday 9th	Quiz Night –Tickets £5 available at Sept. meeting or from Terry Collins
November 13th	The Royal Gunpowder Mills by Andrew Thomas
December 11th	Christmas Party - Members Only
January 8th 2016	Hertfordshire: A Landscape History by Anne Rowe

Unless stated otherwise all meetings are at the Parish Hall at 7.30pm
Members Free. Non Members £2 Tea, Coffee and biscuits included

The SALHS Committee May 2014

Hon. President	Ron Dale
Chairman	Ian White
Secretary	Lynne Heraud
Treasurer	Glenis Collins
Archivist/Historian	Ray Dixon
Archivist/Facebook	Andrea Coppen
Public Relations	Bob Hunt
School Liaison/ Programme Organiser	Janet Dance
Newsletter	Terry Collins
Parish Council Rep	Julia Davies
Committee Members	Linda Gifford Gerald Coppen
Website Manager	Brian Johnson

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