



S.A.L.H.S

website: www.salhs.org.uk

Stanstead Abbots Local History Society

Issue 23

Editor—Terry Collins

July 2017

From Bear Skins to Beer

The title above was the subject of the July meeting presented by Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews the archaeologist with North Herts District Council. Its rather strange title became clear as it transpired that the topic was in fact the archaeology of Stanstead Abbots from the Pleistocene era until the late 19th century, an awful lot to fit into one evening meeting.

He began by speaking about the Ice Age when Stanstead Abbots was in the Thames valley as the river flowed north of St Albans, through Colchester to the sea, which was then dry land. During the following Paleolithic era humans began to arrive in the country from what is now continental Europe. After the last Ice Age people began to settle permanently about 11000 years ago during the Mesolithic age. A Mesolithic site was found in Roydon Road in 1971 when over 1300 flint tools were found, this was confirmed by carbon dating carried out in Cappell Lane. By 4000BC a Neolithic economy was in operation making pottery and creating monuments, A burial site was discovered dating from the 3rd millennium BC midway between Briggens and Halfway House Farm, one of the few in Hertfordshire. And there were also the remains of a Neolithic site found near Moat Wood near Hunsdon.

During the Bronze Age the development of metal edged weapons led to the rise of a warrior class, but

there are no traces of them around Stanstead Abbots. At this time the climate changed dramatically and Northern Europe became cold and wet and hill towns were formed as the population took shelter from incomers and areas of poor soil which effected their ability to farm. An enclosure east of Briggens Farm may also be the site of an Iron Age hill fort.

The arrival of the Romans in 55BC changed the face of the country for nearly 400 years. They possibly crossed the Thames near Greenwich and followed the river Lea northwards. After conquering most of the country South East Britain paid tribute to Rome to ensure peace. Towns began to form across the county such as Braughing and Baldock. More locally, Roman remains have been found around St James church and Stansteadbury, where coins, weights and fragments of tiles have been found, and there were remains of cremation burials in the churchyard. It is possible that Hunsdon road may have been of Roman origin leading north towards Bishop Stortford and south towards the river Lea and its bridge.

After the Romans left Britain an economic crisis spread across the Roman empire lasting for some 30 years. The arrival of the Saxons followed and sixth century materials were found in the Stanstead Abbots area. By 600AD Stanstead Abbots was part of the see of London in the Kingdom of Essex. Stanstede in old English means a stone place possibly

referring to a Roman structure, while Easneye could be partially old English for the Ash, and Rye House is from the English for island.

Records from the Domesday book show that the village at that time had 7 burgesses so it was likely to have been a market town, with the market held at the junction of the High Street and Roydon Road, suggesting the village was in the valley and not at the top of the hill near St James church. Remains of a site near Chapelfields with pits, stake holes and a half cellar were discovered.

The village of Stanstead was granted to the monks of Waltham Abbey by Henry II and St James became the propriety church attached to the manor house. By this time the river had been dredged and widened and it became the principle route into London for Hertfordshire's malted barley which was the dominant industry for the area until the late 19th Century.

Keith answered a number of questions from the audience before Vice Chair Bob Hunt thanked him for a most interesting evening that was enjoyed by all those present.

Terry Collins



Neolithic Flint Axe

SALHS AGM 2017

May saw the society's AGM take place, together with a short talk by Richard and Sara Atkins.

They have researched the Atkins family back to the 17th Century when their ancestors were seamen. The family have lived in the village since the days of Richard's great grandfather. They moved to Stanstead Abbots after his great grandfather while visiting the village was given the money required to use the toll bridge by a passing villager, leading his great grandfather to think that it would be a nice place to live

In the early 20th Century they occupied the building which is now the village pharmacy from where they supplied coal to the village. Members of the family fought in

the Great War which unfortunately saw the death of Richard's Uncle Cecil at the early age of just 19.

Following Richard's talk the AGM itself got under way and began with the election of the committee. Ian White was re-elected as Chairman of the Society along with the current Secretary, Lynne Heraud and Treasurer, Glenis Collins. As were the remainder of the group committee. There are still vacancies for two more members if anyone is interested just have a word with any of the existing committee

After this there was a presentation by Chairman Ian White, who asked the question, 'What is a Local History Society?' He went on to look at all the things SALHS had achieved since its foundation in 2012, when

just 12 people attended a meeting to discuss forming a local history group. During the course of his presentation, two of our committee members spoke briefly about two of the projects currently under way. Rob Gifford told the audience about the village information boards that will hopefully be put up in the near future. Then Ray Dixon told us how the archiving was progressing with a new group of volunteers before telling us about the prospects of a small museum which the committee are hoping to set up in the near future. Ian White was thanked for the hard work he has carried out as Chair during what has been a difficult year for him and the audience showed their appreciation for the splendid job he has done.

Terry Collins

Burtons Shop



Ken and Eva Burton

The much loved shop in the High Street known as Burtons served the villagers as a newsagents for 87 years. Its history can be traced back to 1895 when it was opened as a tobacconists by Mr Pratt, a former butler at Easneye House. When opened and for many years after the shop was very small being only about 10 feet deep. A thin counter stretched from the front to almost the back of the shop where there was a narrow squeeze through. This provided access to the back of the counter and through a door into the living area behind the shop. Given the narrowness of the building there was little room for customers and even less space behind the counter. This tiny shop started out selling a range of tobaccos, smoking accessories and newspapers.

In 1930 Mr Pratt passed the shop down to his son in law Mr Chris Burton who ran the business much as it had been for the previous 35 years. At the end of WWII he handed the shop down to his son Ken Burton. During the time Ken and his wife Eva ran the shop it saw extensions to the retail space with a resultant expansion of the range of goods on offer. Ken had worked in the business in his youth helping his father collect papers from the railway station early in the morning, working in the shop and doing a paper round in Much Hadham, Widford and Hunsdon. At the age of 11 he first met his wife to be when on his paper round at a grocery store in Hunsdon, run by Eva's parents.

Being a newsagent meant the hours were long with Ken more often than not meeting the first morning train from London at about 5.15 am at St Margarets station. Once he had loaded the papers into his car he would take them to his shop for sorting into the paper round bundles. Mick and George ably assisted the Burton family in the shop for many years and were themselves, with their helpfulness and affability, able to add a further layer to the legend that was Burton's shop. Ken and Eva Burton continued to run the popular village business until 1981 when they sold it to Brian Williams and his wife Audrey. Given their popularity the Burtons kept their departure a secret so as not to upset their faithful customers. With advancing years and a grandchild they felt it was time to retire to give themselves some freedom after their long hours running the shop. It is sad to relate that this shop, that had acquired a legendary status in the village finally closed its doors in early January 2017.

Stuart Moye

Slavery Compensation List

Readers may be interested to know that a list has been released showing individuals and companies who were given compensation by the English government for the loss of their slaves after slavery was abolished in the U.K. in 1833.

Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, father of Thomas Fowell Buxton, who built Easneye manor and became lord of the manor in 1868, had worked tirelessly for the abolition of slavery, taking over from William Wilberforce. His curly-haired bespectacled image can still be seen on the reverse of the last paper £5 notes printed before the plastic ones were introduced. In 1837 the Slavery Compensation Act allowed previous slave owners

compensation amounting to over £20 million, a vast amount at that time.

There were 47,000 people in the U.K. who were paid amounts varying from a few pounds to one instance of a man with 415 slaves being paid £20,511, worth £17 million today. These huge amounts hardly seem fair and we may feel they should have been paid to the slaves themselves, a sentiment that descendants of slaves are now taking some interest in. Fourteen Caribbean nations are currently suing Britain, France and other European countries for compensation.

The list of slave-owners has been kept secret until recently and is still in process of being completed. This

government paper is copyrighted, but individuals can search online. The paper list is not easy to use as it is listed by the name of each slave colony and not by owners. This can be obtained by online subscription. It is in the House of Commons Parliamentary Papers 1837-8 (215), volume 48, and is 365 pages long. There is much online information under *Slavery Compensation List*. For those who wish to discover if their ancestors were slave-owners, there is a search site and this is an interesting addition to family history research, assuming that you really want to know!

Ron Dale

A Village Wedding 1910



This magnificent wedding picture was taken on the occasion of the marriage of Robert William Bright to Elizabeth Edith Howe on August 1st 1910. Robert lived at no. 18 South Street, Stanstead Abbots, the bride who was originally from the Cambridge Heath area of London was living, while in domestic service, in one of the large houses in Great Amwell. The wedding took place at St Johns church Great Amwell followed by a reception at the Jolly Fisherman pub, then known as the Railway Tavern. The picture was taken in the yard of the malting which once stood on the site of today's Riverside Gardens. The house in the background was referred to as the Factory House believed to be the residence of Walter Upton. He is the gentleman

centre back with the bowler hat and the fine moustache and it is he who gave permission for the use of the yard for the wedding picture to be taken. The happy couple were soon to move to Dersingham near Sandringham in Norfolk where Robert set up a plumbers business. It was passed down through the family that his claim to fame was that he was just the once called to do an emergency job for HRH at Sandringham House, when the usual plumbers were unavailable to attend.

Other notables in the photograph include Mr and Mrs Howe 3rd and 4th on the front seated row followed by a bridesmaid by the name of Maude who is thought to be a Gilby. Next is the happy couple followed by a second bridesmaid only recorded as Fanny who is sat next to Matilda Bright, the groom's mother. The man directly behind the bride and groom flanked by two of his sisters is a younger brother of the groom and the author's Grandfather. The photograph, which so wonderfully captures the fashion of the times, was taken by the local photographic company T. S. Robinson who had a studio on the High Street.

Stuart Moye

The RAF at Hunsdon

The RAF station at Hunsdon was built in 1940-41, trains from London brought up the building materials to St Margarets station from where they were transported to the site, no doubt to the annoyance of Hunsdon's inhabitants. There were two runways forming a letter X. The site was ready for use in May 1941 but the building work was not completed until 1943. By the time it was completed there were almost 200 wooden huts and up to 2000 personnel. With this number, almost all of them male, it is no wonder that the Fox and Hounds and the Old Turkey Cock became the focal points of the village.

Although the station was not built to take heavy bombers at least 36 B17 Flying Fortress aircraft landed there during the war. The first unit to ar-

rive was 85 Squadron flying Boston Havoc's. But the airfield is best known for the De Havilland Mosquito which flew from Hunsdon from 1943. Originally used as night fighters they switched to daytime tactical fast bombers. Mosquitos flew from Hunsdon until the end of



1944. The commanding officer at Hunsdon until April 1942 was Wing Commander Peter Townsend, who you may remember was engaged to Princess Margaret. He was succeeded by John 'Cats Eyes' Cunningham, who was credited with 20 enemy aircraft shot down. He remained in command at Hunsdon until March 1944.

At the end of December 1943 it was decided to transfer 140 Wing Tactical Air Force to Hunsdon from Norfolk under the command of Group Captain Percy Pickard. The Wing had not been there long when they were they were ordered to at-

tack the prison at Amiens in Northern France. This prison supposedly held almost 700 prisoners some of whom were important resistance leaders, so it was said. The raid took place in bad weather on February 18th 1944. Nineteen Mosquitos supported by Hawker Typhoon fighter escorts took off from Hunsdon towards their target.

Three squadrons were due to attack the prison in three groups flying at an altitude of about 60 feet. The prison was duly hit and damaged, the walls were breached and men were seen running across snow covered fields. Most of them were recaptured shortly after however. Pickard's plane, flying at number 12 was intercepted by two German Focke Wulf fighters and the tail of his aircraft was shot off and his aircraft crashed killing both Pickard and his navigator, they are both buried near the city of Amiens.

Even now the full story of this raid is not fully known, some say that there were no resistance fighters in the prison, another story is that the object was to release some of the prisoners before they were executed. The full story may never be known.

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.

The SALHS Committee June 2017

Hon. President	Ron Dale
Chairman	Ian White
Secretary	Lynne Heraud
Treasurer	Glenis Collins
Archivist/Historian	Ray Dixon
Archivist/Facebook	Andrea Coppen
Public Relations/Vice Chair	Bob Hunt
Newsletter /Vice Chair	Terry Collins
Parish Council Rep	Julia Davies
Committee Members:	
	Linda Gifford
	Gerald Coppen
	Rob Gifford
	John Lloyd
	Rosemary James
Website Manager	Brian Johnson
General enquiries email	
Admin@salhs.org.uk	

Forthcoming events

August	13th 2017	BBQ Members Only (30 persons maximum)
September	8th 2017	Children of The Working Poor by Eileen Wallace
October	13th 2017	14th Century Ware by David Perman
November	10th 2017	Watermills and Windmills by Robin Webb
December	8th 2017	Christmas Party (Members Only)
January	12th 2018	Hertfordshire Parks and Tudors 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