

# S.A.L.H.S

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*Stanstead Abbotts Local History Society*

**Issue 24**

Editor—Terry Collins

**October 2017**

## Children of the Working Poor

The title above was the topic for our September meeting, given by former teacher and archivist Eileen Wallace. She began by telling us what type of work children had to do and why. In the early Victorian era children from poorer families were forced to work from an early age or the family would most likely finish in the workhouse. As these families were living in run down overcrowded houses and with almost a third of the population children it was inevitable that they formed a large part of the working population.

In parts of Hertfordshire for instance, girls and boys may have started their working lives aged eight or nine years of age. Girls may have been working at silk mills as silk throwers while boys may have started as farm boys or even worse as a chimney sweeps boy. The overcrowding and housing was particularly bad in parts of Hitchin

where in one street there was one toilet between ten houses, animals like pigs were kept at home to ensure food was available. It is believed that Hitchin had some of the worst slums in the county.

Being mainly an agricultural county many boys and some girls were sent to work on farms, which could be as dangerous as the factories. In 1867 George Fisher aged 11 was looking after a horse and cart, the horse was blind and it ran up a bank and the cart turned over, George fell off and the horse fell on him and he died. Children missed school, which was not compulsory by taking time off to help their families with the harvest.

Brick making was another industry employing lots of young children, this was very dirty and unhealthy work. There are no brick works left working in the county although there are remains near Digswell. Children carried 40lb loads on their heads all day causing any number of injuries. One boy was discovered weighing 50lb and carrying 40lb loads all day. This was discovered by the writer George Smith who managed to get children under 14 forbidden from working in the brick fields. A good description of the brick fields can be found in Dickens 'Bleak House'.

For boys however the worst job was that of chimney sweep. Aged 6 they were taken on as apprentices. There are numerous tales of boys getting stuck in chimneys or dying from cancers caught from the ash



Child Factory Worker

and dust. In Hertford the Dye family were sweeps for 200 years at Goldings, many of the chimneys were only 20 inches square. On one instance the boy went up the chimney, after not hearing from him for some time, a bricklayer was called to come and dismantle the chimney but the boy had suffocated. His father, the sweep, then got the dead boys brother to do the job. A law was introduced in 1840 to make it illegal for boys under 20 to go up chimneys but it was largely ignored and climbing boys were not stopped until 1875. The slum area around Bircherley Green in Hertford was where many of them lived.

Another scheme for employing children was to send them to woollen mills in Lancashire away from their families..

Things only got better with the coming of compulsory education with the Act of 1880 and 1893, but even then the infant mortality level was still high.

*Terry Collins*



19th Century Sweep's Boy

## Ware in the 14th Century Entrepreneurs and Rebels

We welcomed a return visit from local historian and author David Perman in October to talk to us on the above subject. He began by explaining how it came about. One day in 1991 a friend of his, Des Chappell arrived on his doorstep with a large cardboard box bearing the words, Lux Soap-flakes. He was told that he had a week to check the contents, see if they were valuable and what should be done with them. On examining the contents he discovered they were medieval deeds from the 14th Century and related to the town of Ware.

Many of them were stitched together and some were made of velum. On closer examination a lot of them proved to be Lay Subsidy rolls, which listed all the men and women of the town who were eligible to pay tax and how much they owed. This was a rare opportunity to find out about the ordinary people of the town and not just the upper classes. One of the family names that appeared was the Blake family who were one of the more important ones, John Blake became the Hertfordshire coroner and Nicholas Blake purchased the lease of the manor of Eastwick in later life.

Other documents discovered included some referring to John of Gaunt, the richest man in England. Later in the century he sued 104 men for sacking Hertford Castle in 1381, the following year he sued the same men for sacking the Savoy Palace in London. The tax rolls showed that Sawbridge-worth was the richest town in Hertfordshire paying over £7 in tax, while Stanstead paid only a few shillings.

Some of the most important buildings in Ware during this period were the inns. One of which,

The Old Saracens Head, was possibly built in about 1250 during the crusades and was demolished in 1958. One of the others, The Horn on the Hoof, was the scene of a crime in 1390 when one of the residents, John Roller, had £22 stolen from a wooden box he had in his possession, another resident Thomas Landerdale was accused of the theft although he maintained his innocence.

Many of the buildings in Ware High Street are still on 'burbage' plots of land, long thin strips leading down to the river. In the 14th Century shops made up the majority of buildings in Middle Row, many of which were market stalls which had become permanent features. Towards the end of the century Ware had become an As-size town and was one of the largest and richest in the county.

For a number of years there had been constant harassment from Hertford towards Ware and its residents, they claimed that Ware only had a charter for a market on one day of the week, but that they had been holding it on three or four days every week. Hertford was in a position to cause problems for Ware because it had the backing of John Of Gaunt and Queen Isabella (The She-Wolf of France), the wife of King Edward II who was living in Hertford Castle.



Queen Isabella of France

In about 1343 the Black Death struck the British Isles, brought here by fleas on Black Rats. This plague,



The Black Death Strikes

both bubonic and pneumonic, swept the country and within a few years it killed between 40 and 60% of the population. The result led to a short supply of farm labourers who were able to demand higher wages. This was one of the causes of the Peasants Revolt of 1381 together with the Poll Tax to be used to finance the French wars. Surprisingly none of the local men who took part in the revolt were punished, indeed some of them prospered. Why? Because Ware had the protection of Joan of Kent (Known as the Fair Maid of Kent) former wife of Edward the Black Prince and mother of Richard II.

Moving on into the 15th Century there was an increase in the number of inns in the town, one being the White Hart which became the HS BC bank.

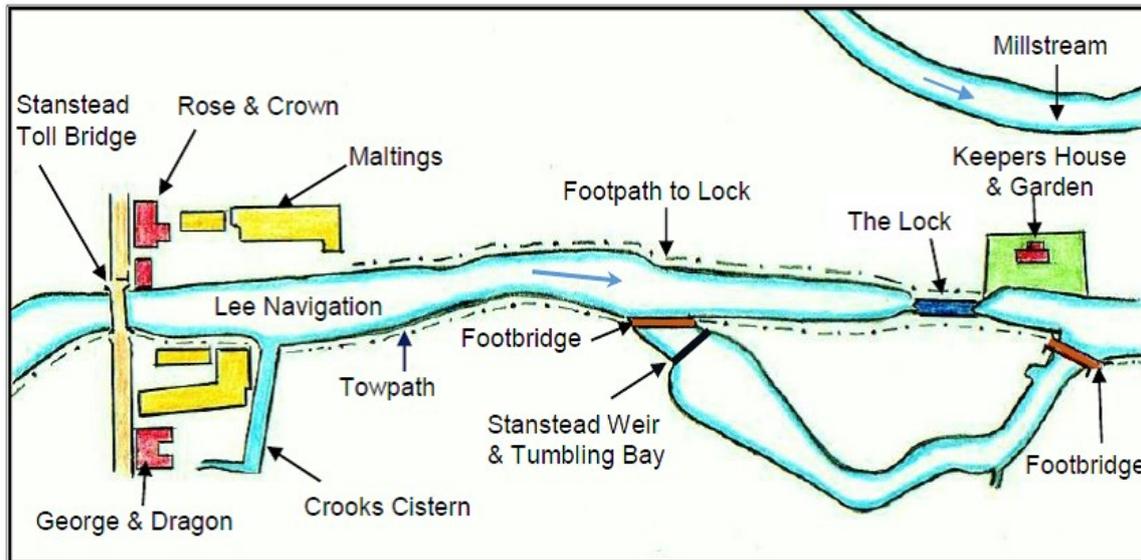
Relations with Hertford improved and that was finally made the county town in the mid 17th Century.

*Terry Collins*

### Important Notice

Our November meeting has been changed due to the speaker having to go into hospital. Instead we have been able to get at short notice, Fergal Sharkey speaking to us on the very local topic of The History of Amwell Magna Fisheries.

## Old Stanstead Lock by Stuart Moye



Old Stanstead Lock existed for 100 years between 1767 and 1857. It was located 350 yards downstream of Stanstead Bridge on a new short navigation cut. Both this straight channel and the lock were constructed in 1766/7. At first the lock was known as Leak's Lock but soon became officially referred to as Stanstead Lock, not to be confused with the modern lock of the same name, upstream of the river bridge. Memories of the 1767 lock are still widely recalled among the more elderly villagers, a somewhat surprising fact, given that it was removed about 160 years ago. Up to the middle of last century an apple tree was still to be found growing in what had been the lock keeper's garden and this may have helped keep alive the oral history of Old Stanstead Lock.

The map above shows the main features downstream of Stanstead Bridge as they existed between 1767 and 1857. The George and Dragon pub shown to the left of the map still exists today as the Jolly Fisherman. Crook's Cistern was a barge dock which is thought to date from between 1701 and 1707 when Japhet Crook was the Lord of the Manor at St. Margarets. The lock and the weir effectively dammed the river permitting an adequate depth of water to be maintained on the upstream side. This meant that all year round navigation was possible along the historically shallow section of the river from upstream of Stanstead Bridge to the lock. A weir had existed further along the loop of the river shown on the map well before the building of the lock. The natural drop in the river here could well be the site of an early water mill that pre dated the construction of the Roydon Road mill and the millstream.

The lock, weir and loop of the river were removed after the present ["new"] Stanstead Lock was brought into use in 1857. Christopher Chamberlain, the last lock keeper, held that position between 1828 and 1857. It is pleasing to note that the River Lea Trustees awarded him a pension of 10/- per week when his services were no longer required after the lock was removed late in 1857.

*[An article "Old Stanstead Lock" to be found on the SALHS website offers more detail on this topic.]*

### SALHS Barbecue 2017

Sunday August 13th was the date for the annual SALHS summer barbecue. For the second time the venue was the lovely garden at Bachelors Hall with our hosts Rowan and John Lloyd. Fortunately the weather was quite good during the afternoon

This year John Lloyd was our chef and proved himself adept with the tongs. 29 members attended the event and this year things were done slightly differently. We supplied the sausages, burgers and bread while the attendees brought food for all to share. This resulted in a huge

amount of food for us together with lots of very yummy desserts.

All those who attended enjoyed the afternoon, and most of them will hopefully be back again next year at about the same time.

However we can only hold a SALHS barbecue if we can find a suitable venue, if you have a garden that is large enough and would welcome some guests on an afternoon then please let us know.

*Terry Collins*

## Did Stanstead have a Gin Distillery

In a comprehensive street by street history of Clerkenwell in London, we encounter the company history of Booth's Gin as they started this most successful company in Cowcross Street, Clerkenwell about 1770. It began as a partnership between John Mootham and Philip Booth, but by 1772 they had parted company and the firm was known as Philip Booth & Co. This Cowcross Distillery was to establish the Booth family for 200 years and the Booths empire eventually became the largest gin distillery in the country. In time the business passed into the hands of Philip's sons, Felix, William and John.

Other distilleries were built and by 1830 William had died and John had retired, leaving Felix

Booth in sole charge. We have already outlined in detail his philanthropic sponsoring of the Arctic Expedition in an earlier report, which earned Felix a Baronetcy. One interesting gem of information wrapped up in this company's history however, concerns Stanstead Abbots. It is recorded here that one of their ventures to increase business was to become distillers of vinegar, but as nothing further was heard of this, it appears to have been a failure. However, the company records state that: *'By 1787 Philip Booth & Co. had acquired other properties and they also had a distillery at Stanstead Abbots, Hertfordshire.'*

As there is no mention of a gin distillery in Stanstead Abbots at any time in its history, it can only be assumed that the distillery Booths opened here was for vinegar, made from the product Stanstead Abbots is famous for, malt. We know from Edwardian

postcard illustrations that a company called Champion Vinegar, a very successful company, was advertising their product boldly on a wooden malting on the riverside next to the northern side of the bridge and it is possible this building had been there for a century or more.



Was this the malting first opened by Philip Booth, but soon abandoned to others when he changed his mind and decided to concentrate on what he did best? It seems most likely. Champion & Slee Vinegar had a factory in Old Street, London in 1850, but the malt may have come from Stanstead Abbots. **Ron Dale**

### 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

November	10th	2017	A History of Amwell Magna Fishery by Feargal Sharkey
December	8th	2017	Christmas Party (Members Only)
January	12th	2018	Hertfordshire Parks and Tudors by Anne Rowe
February	9th	2018	River Lea-Luton to Leyton by Richard Thomas
March	9th	2018	The Fall and Rise of the English Country House in the 20th Century by Tim Turner
April	14th	2018	Remarkable Women in Hertfordshire's History by Julie Gregson

Unless stated otherwise all meetings are at the Parish Hall at 7.30pm

Members Free. Non Members £2 Tea, Coffee and biscuits included