

# S.A.L.H.S

website: [www.salhs.org.uk](http://www.salhs.org.uk)

*Stanstead Abbotts Local History Society*

**Issue 29**

Editor—Terry Collins

**January 2019**

## The River Lea-Luton to Leyton

November saw the return of Richard Thomas with his talk on our local river and its journey from its beginnings in Bedfordshire to its meeting with the Thames in London. It seems that the river was originally called Lygea but by 1571 it was called the River of Lee. Since then we have seen the development of the Lee Navigation and the Lee Valley Regional Park,

The Lee and its tributaries are spread across 500 square miles. It has a number of tributaries including the rivers, Mimram, Beane, Rib near Hertford, the Quin and the Little Ash and in the east of the county the Stort which joins the Lee between Rye House and Broxbourne.

The Lee begins its journey just north of Luton at Leagrave where there were originally five springs although only three remain and they run underground for some of the way through Luton passing by Luton Hoo house. The river now heads south towards the town of Harpenden and then on towards the old village of Wheathampsted. Near here, in the past, there were watermills and a flourishing trade in watercress, grown in beds. The area is referred to by Izaak Walton in 'The Compleat Angler.' From here the river flows south again past Brocket Hall and then on to Lemsford mill, where there had been a watermill at the site since the 11th century. It is also the place where a man named J.P. Skelly wrote the song Nellie Deane after seeing an attractive girl by the riverside. Milling continued until 1913 when



River Lea Hertford Castle

it became a private residence. As the mill is on the grounds of the Brocket Hall estate, two of Queen Victoria's Prime Ministers, Lords Melbourne and Palmeston, were landlords of the mill.

Still heading south the river then flows past Stanborough Lakes onto Mill Green, past Hatfield House and on towards Hertford, where it is joined by the rivers Beane and Rib. At Hertford Castle Weir the river changes from a relatively small shallow river to a deep canal, and on its way towards Ware it passes by the Folly Island, which was once a proper island, now best known for the house fronting the river and the Old Barge public house. It then passes by the site of Dicker Mill, leading to Hertford lock with an 1878 Lock keepers cottage.

This is now the New River which was opened in 1613 to supply water to London, but an Act of Parliament in 1660 restricted the amount to 20 million gallons per day. After leaving Hertford the river flows into Ware and is noted for

the 18th and 19th century gazebos which overlook the river. South of Ware the River and the Navigation separate. Passing through Ware the river then passes through Stanstead Abbotts and Rye House and flows towards Hoddesdon and Dobbs Weir and then Broxbourne and Cartagena Lock (named after Admiral Vernon who captured the city of Cartagena in Colombia during the War Of Jenkins Ear in 1739). From here the river passes through Cheshunt and Waltham Cross, where in 1991 narrow boats from across the country gathered for a boat rally, nearly 400 vessels attended, 2 similar events have followed.

Shortly after this the M 25 crosses the river and its adjacent flood relief channel heading towards Ponders End, where until the 1960's lots of timber was delivered to the local furniture factories, from here some of the locks heading south are duplicated because the heavy boat traffic caused jams in the locks. Continuing towards the Thames we pass by Walthamstow and Hackney Marshes until we arrive at Old Ford Lock where boats can either continue towards the Limehouse Cut and the River Thames or turn off along the Hertford union Canal into the Regents Canal having travelled 27 miles from the start of the Lee Navigation at Hertford.

Richard answered a few questions from the audience and was warmly thanked by the Chairman Bob Hunt.

*Terry Collins*

## Holiday Guests by Stuart Moye

Mr Henry Teale developed the Rye House Pleasure Gardens from the late 1840s onwards. Bank Holidays were the busiest times attracting large numbers of visitors from the packed streets of the East End of London. On these days numbers ranged from at least 10,000 up to 25,000 on some of the exceptionally busy Bank Holidays. These East Enders looked forward to their escape from the difficult lives many endured in London and came to enjoy, even if only for a day, the delights of Rye House, the river and the surrounding settlements. Mr Teale was an astute businessman and was aware that he was bringing into the area much welcome additional income. However he was always concerned that any trouble caused by the visitors in the neighbouring towns and villagers could undermine the success of his business. In order to minimise the negative impact of so many visitors Mr Teale only opened his Pleasure Gardens between 10am and 4.30pm. He also ensured that the special reduced fare excursions trains he arranged with the railway company departed Rye House Station before 6pm. This at least reduced the numbers who were able to descend on Hoddesdon, Stanstead Abbots and St. Margarets for an evening in the local public houses.

However many visitors arrived by road in a selection of borrowed and hired transport and a good proportion of these folk did choose to stay on for an extended day in the country. Although Hoddesdon seems to have attracted the bulk of these evening revellers Stanstead Abbots and St. Margarets also received their proportionate share. From Mr Teale's point of view the extra income which local traders made enhanced his reputation and the value of his business to the local communities. It is known that in Stanstead Abbott's public houses locals were telling the Londoners fanciful stories about village life. The more entertaining the stories the more beer the storyteller was bought by an appreciative audience. These evenings may well be the source of some of the more fanciful myths and legends about the history of the village that have come down to us today.

The mix of folk enjoying a rare day out and plenty of drink did unfortunately lead to scuffles and disturbances. For those not financially benefiting from the London visitors this was viewed in a poor light. When things had got particularly rowdy people would become quite vocal about their disdain of such unaccepta-

ble behaviour. An example of this from Stanstead Abbots was published in the Hertfordshire Mercury in September 1887. The letter started by explaining that there had been several visits during the previous few weeks by East Enders to the quiet little rural village of Stanstead Abbots. It further suggested that the Londoners referred to their visits as "Having a fine old time of it down in the country". There then followed a list of what the writer assumed they meant by "a fine old time". This included references to drunken, immoral and disgusting behaviour in the public street, filthy language and insolent behaviour towards locals. The decent people in the village were described as bitterly complaining about the lack of action by the Police even after the repeated days on which these things had occurred. A plea to the Home Secretary was threatened if the Police failed to take action to curb this behaviour in the future. The piece was headed "Where are the Police" and was sent in by "One of the Sufferers", of Stanstead Abbots.

The majority of locals it appears were, for one reason or another, more welcoming towards the day visitors from London. Much money was brought into the village and establishments like the Red Lion, Pied Bull and the pub known today as the Jolly Fisherman particularly benefited from the large numbers they attracted through their doors. Also many locals found a day's well paid employment providing a variety of services and items for sale to the day trippers. As for Henry Teale he took



his business at Rye House from strength to strength and was increasingly held in high esteem by the local business men, many of whom made considerable extra money from the large numbers who came to the area on those high days and holidays. The Rye House Pleasure Gardens continued to attract large numbers up to WWI. Like so much in the country things were never quite the same after the

war but considerable numbers continued to visit until the late 1920s. A change of ownership at Rye House and changing times saw visitor numbers rapidly decline. The closest seaside resorts were becoming more affordable and attractive as an alternative day trip for most ordinary folk. The Railway was not slow either in encouraging reduced fare day trips to Southend and Clacton for those families who had traditionally frequented the Lea Valley for their days out. The Rye House venue not surprisingly fell into decline and the days of large numbers of East Enders visiting Stanstead Abbots and St. Margarets became a thing of the past.

## Windmills and Watermills

January saw a welcome return for Robin Webb, who last spoke to us about the Much Hadham forge and museum in September 2014. This time however his subject was both Wind and Watermills.

There is now only one windmill remaining in the county and that is at the small village of Cromer, between Buntingford and Stevenage, and is owned by the Hertfordshire Buildings Preservation Trust.

Although it is no longer able to grind, due to the road nearby, it is in working order and at times is open to the public when guided tours are available. Grinding corn is not the only purpose of a windmill, they have also been used since at least the ninth century to pump water and for drainage purposes.

The existing mill was built in 1681 although a mill had stood in the villager for hundreds of years before that. Until the mid 19th century there were hundreds, if not thousands of mill spread across the country. During the middle ages laws stated that no person should live more than one and a half miles from a working mill.

There are various types of windmill in the country namely, the



Cromer Windmill - A post mill

Post Mill, the Smock Mill and the Tower Mill which all grind grain but do so in different ways, Cromer windmill is a post mill, so called because it rest on a wooden post, which is supported by a wooden trestle which supports the weight of the mill on brick piers. The body of the mill (or buck) contains all the corn grinding machinery which is reached via a ladder or steps. In order to keep the sails facing the wind the whole of the buck has to be turned, and this is done by pushing or pulling a large wooden beam which protrudes from the body of the mill. Most mills of this type now have a small usually 8 bladed fantail which is geared so that it automatically turns the buck so that the sails always face the wind.

Smock mills are also usually wooden but the main difference is that only the top of the building, the cap revolve. The structure usually has six or eight sides built on a brick base and usually tapers towards the top. Because of its design it is often taller than a post mill. The hey day of the Smock mill was the 18th and 19th century before their decline in the wake of the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 which allowed the imports of grain from other countries.

Finally there is the Tower Mill possibly the most famous type, made of brick, like the Smock mill it tapers towards the top and has a cap which revolves operating the grinding

wheels. This type of mill originated in the 13th Century and during the 18th and 19th centuries more than one hundred mills of this type were built in England, over half of them in Lincolnshire.

Watermills can also be used for grinding corn as well as providing power for sawmills, paper mills and textile mills. The wheel on a watermill (called the great spur wheel) can be fitted either vertically (most common) or horizontal. Typically the water propelling the wheel comes from a river or pond, along a pipe or channel (a mill race) with the force of the water turning the wheel. Watermills used for grinding corn have vertical wheels and gearing which turns a horizontal wheel which turns the grind stones. The nearest watermill to Stanstead Abbots still in working order is at Mill Green at Welwyn which still produces flour that is sold to Simmonds the bakers.

Robin brought with him three wooden models of a Post mill, Smock mill and a watermill which enabled members of the audience to take a closer look at how these different types of mill operate. He then answered a number of questions from the audience before being warmly thanked by Chairman Bob Hunt.

*Terry Collins*



Smock Mill— Cranbrook Kent



Tower Mill Norfolk

## SALHS Christmas Party 2018

December 14th saw the 2018 SALHS Christmas party, and what a good time was had by all those that attended. There was plenty of food to go round provided by the members themselves with mulled wine, beer, soft drinks and wine provided by SALHS committee.

The evenings entertainment was the best yet, it started with two songs by secretary, Lynne Heraud, and her singing partner Pat Bishop. Those of you who have seen them will know that they are an excellent duo singing traditional songs and their own compositions.

This was followed by a really laugh out loud sketch performed by committee members Ray Dixon and John Lloyd dressed as Lord Nelson and Captain Thomas Hardy, trying to fight the battle of Trafalgar with Health and Safety rules and political correctness, e.g. Can't fight the French as they are our European neighbours. The audience really enjoyed this very amusing sketch, well performed.

Following this we were treated to more music, this time from Beth Gifford and Matt Brookes on viola and accordion. I followed this reading a poem by Pam Ayres entitled, 'Goodwill to all men - Give us your money'.

Linda and Rob Gifford then told us all about the Victorian Christmas and the evening finished with a hilarious song from Lynne and Pat again, the Ashbocking dance, sung and danced in costume and false beards.

*Terry Collins*

## Remembrance Beacon

On Remembrance Sunday, 11th November, more than 200 people gathered on a field near Easeneye college overlooking London, to commemorate the end of WW1. Spectators had been gathering at the location since about 6.00pm, fortunately it was a dry clear evening for the event.

At 6.50pm a national tribute was read out, 6.55pm the Last Post was played by a bugler and at 7.00pm our Beacon was lit, one of about 1300 across the British Isles. Then, at 7.05pm the church bells began to ring out all across the land. This was all part of a national scheme entitled 'The Battles Over- A Nations Tribute'. From our location it was possible to see London at night with many firework displays taking place, and many of London's landmarks illuminated.

This event was organised by a small committee made up from SALHS members, Parish Councillors and notable individuals who spent a number of months getting everything ready. Many thanks go to Mass from the Red Lion for providing the food and drink on the evening, to the Scouts for the use of their tents and lighting (and their help putting them up) and to Nicholas Buxton for the use of his land and to Jonathon Trower for his assistance.

It was good to see so many people at a truly once in a lifetime event.

*Terry Collins*

### The SALHS Committee June 2017

Hon. President     Ron Dale  
Chairman/Public Relations  
                                 Bob Hunt  
Secretary             Lynne Heraud  
Treasurer             Glenis Collins  
Archivist/Historian   Ray Dixon  
Archivist/Facebook   Andrea Coppen  
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

### 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

February	8th	2019	History of Tea by Tim Turner from Sworders
March	8th	2019	Harlow New Town - How and Why by David Devine
April	12th	2019	Hertfordshire and the Slave Trade by Marion Hill
May	10th	2019	AGM + A Talk on the High Street
June	14th	2019	History of the Lee Valley Park by Amy Lewis
July	12th	2019	TBA

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

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