

S.A.L.H.S

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Stanstead Abbotts Local History Society

Issue 14

Editor—Terry Collins

April 2015

Theobalds - Hertfordshire's lost Royal Palace

Local bookshop owner Stephen Poulter was our January speaker, when he told us of the fascinating history of Theobalds Manor, once sited just off Cedars Park in Cheshunt,

The original manor was called Cullynges but from 1385 was known as Thebaudes, Tibbolds and latterly Theobalds. It was a relatively small moated manor house with 181 acres of land. In 1441 the manor, being owned by the crown was passed to John Carpenter who held it for the crown and paid a rent of one bow valued at 3 shillings and one barbed arrow, valued at 3 pence.

Little else is known about the manor until it came into the ownership of William Cecil. The Cecil's came from minor gentry on the Welsh borders who served both Henry VII and VIII but came to prominence under Elizabeth I. He was created Lord Burleigh in 1571 and became Lord Chancellor and died in 1598. He had a passion for building and built two palaces in Hertfordshire one being Hatfield House and the other the manor of Theobald, which Cecil purchased from William Burbage in 1564.

Being a small manor it would have consisted of a central great hall and kitchen with the other rooms radiating from them. When Queen Elizabeth visited Cecil at Theobalds, he wrote that she was not very happy with the building

and he set about enlarging it. The design for the new building can now be seen in the Hatfield House archives. It must have pleased the Queen as she visited the house on no less than seven other occasions, when she held court.

Nothing remains of the palace and only one contemporary picture remains, dating from 1653, when it was described as a very princely seat. A plan of Theobalds shows that it was brick built and had two quadrangles



The Palace of Theobalds

and two gatehouses. One of the drawings of the entrance is possibly by Cecil himself as he had a fascination with Italian Renaissance architecture.

As one approached the house you passed through a number of gates and courtyards. In the 1650's it was described as having a great number of turrets and spires, very similar to Hatfield House. The middle court was 110 feet square and the surrounding building housed all the visiting monarchs rooms, including those for a potential husband. The courtyard building consisted of a quadrangle with

cloisters surrounding it all copied from Italian designs. On entering the next courtyard, the fountain court, you would have seen a black and white marble fountain and more cloisters. The grand entrance was also in the fountain court, and was built in the form of a tower with a clock and 12 bells.

Along the top of the roof there would have been a 'Roof walk' a common feature on Elizabethan Grand houses, enabling visitors and the family the opportunity to look over the parkland and observe passing travellers.

Inside, tapestries would have hung on the walls and carpets on the floors, which were outstanding. The roofs were of curved timber, as can be seen at Burleigh house. Moving into the Presence Chamber, it was designed to show the signs of the zodiac,

painted on the walls, and also trees which appeared to grow within the room but which were in fact real tree branches coated in plaster. Lots of oak carving would have been seen in this chamber together with a large stained glass window so there would have been lots of heraldic decoration. Large marble and plaster fireplaces would also have been prominent

There would have been a grand open staircase, with lots of decoration and painting, sometimes made to look like marble. The crowning glory in all Elizabethan grand hous-

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Theobalds - Hertfordshires lost Royal Palace - contd.

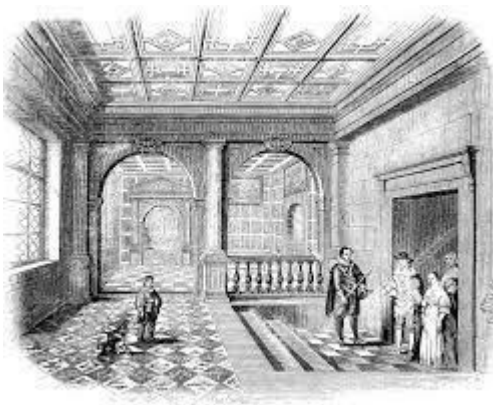
es was the long gallery. The one in Theobalds was 110 feet long with a gilded ceiling and decorated wall panels, while there was a second gallery 105 feet in length.

The main gardens were to the south of the house. They covered 7 acres. At one end was a raised mound enabling people to walk to the top and look down on the knot garden and the maze. A lake was also to be found in the garden, large enough to row around. The other must have feature always to be found were fountains of which there were a number. The gardens were designed by John Gerard using newly discovered plants brought from overseas.

After William Cecil died the Palace passed to his son Robert, who later became the Earl of Suffolk. After he succeeded to the throne James I stayed for a number of nights at Theobalds a number of times until 1606. After this there were a number of masques held, some of them designed by the playwright Ben Jonson and the architect Inigo Jones costing at least £1000, an enormous amount at the time. The most lavish being the 'handover masque' when the prop-

erty was handed over to the crown, while Robert Cecil received Hatfield House in return.

King James was obsessed with hunting and so he enlarged the land by enclosing Cheshunt park and buying land from local gentry. This did not go down well with



King Charles 1st and his wife Henrietta Maria at Theobalds

some, as well as costing over £11000 for the work. The total length of the wall was over 10 miles. In 1623 there were riots in Cheshunt against the taking of some common land. James also opened a menagerie with elephants, camels and flying squirrels. King James died while he was at Theobalds, and the property

passed to Charles I.

During the Civil War, Theobalds was occupied by Parliamentary troops and at its end it was decided to raise the money to pay the troops by selling some of the crown lands. Major General William Packer, now controlling the manor and its land, divided it up and thousands of trees were felled for use by the navy. Packer and his men had their own religious beliefs and had built their own chapel on the site. By now parts of the palace had been pillaged for stone and timber.

In 1661 the palace was granted to General Monk for his help in the succession of Charles II, but by 1689 it had reverted to the crown and was now partially demolished. The remains of the palace were now passed to the Earl of Portland together with the park and all its lands. By 1765 the palace had been totally demolished, some of it used as building material for houses.

This ends the first part of the story of Theobalds Palace and Stephen will return later to bring things up to date by looking at what happened next. He was warmly thanked by the Chairman and answered a number of questions from the audience, ending a fascinating evenings talk.

Terry Collins

The Poor Law in East Herts in the 17th Century

Our March meeting saw the welcome return of Dr. Alan Johnson with this intriguing title.

He began by telling us the causes of poverty, crop failure, population increase, unemployment and currency fluctuation, together with diseases that were endemic at the time, such as plague, smallpox and typhus.

The poor were divided into three distinct types, the important poor, consisting of widows, children

and the elderly, then the deserving poor, those who were honest and hardworking and finally the beggars and vagabonds.

Every parish set its own Poor Law rate which varied from place to place. Money was collected by the church wardens every week for the poor of the parish. In addition individual wealthy householders gave money.

Dr. Johnson then went on to give numerous examples of how the

poor were assisted either by the giving of money or food, and in some cases by lending men tools to enable them to work. In Ware land on the meads was used by the Poor Law Trustees to raise money for the poor by renting out for grazing, they then bought the Holy Lamb Inn in the town and profits from that also went to the poor.

In Hertford profits from shops and inns raised £285 a large sum in the.

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Ware History with a Nod to Stanstead Abbots

Local historian David Perman was our April speaker looking at the development and history of Ware and how Stanstead Abbots fits in. It seems that Ware is one of the oldest continually occupied sites in Western Europe dating back over 10,000 years.

There are Roman sites in a number of places including Ware, Amwell, Hertford and at Foxholes Farm. Ware sits on the site of Ermine street one of the more important Roman roads and it would pass today through the Glaxo building, as remnants of a small town of timber and flint buildings were found during the building. Jewellery, pottery from Italy, and the skeleton of a Roman girl aged about 16 and nicknamed 'Ermintrude'

Ware was the limit of navigation on the River Lea until the 19th Century and there was a bridge there in Roman times as well as a temple. As a number of Roman coins were found during excavations it is possible that it was a toll bridge but more likely there was a shrine to the river god 'Lug' In 1831 during further excavations two more skeletons and more Roman coins were found. After the Romans left Britain in the 5th century the town of Ware expanded towards what is now Baldock street and Ermine Street moved to the East.

During the 9th century Viking raids from the north of England spread as far south as the River Lea. During the reign of King Alfred however a truce was made with them and they were allowed to rule parts of the country in an area known as the Danelaw, both Ware and Stanstead Abbots were within its area. In 894 a large Viking force sailed on the Lea and built a

fort 20 miles from London. To combat this a large body of troops came from London but were defeated by the Vikings at a battle, possibly near Widbury Hill. Alfred then built two forts, one on each side of the river and the Vikings were forced to march overland towards Bristol to escape. Alfred's son Edward built a fort at Hertford which must have already existed as it guarded the river crossing at Ware, but there is no evidence of any settlement there before the 10th Century, although the name Hertford is much older. The Saxon lord was Ascell, a thane of the King who held 22 manors around the country and was a government quarter master.

The Domesday book states that



Ware had a population of 125 persons, had 5 mills, a fishery with 300 eels, a park for hunting and had its own priest, but no mention of a church.

By the middle ages the town was held by Hugh de Grandesmil, one of King William The Conqueror's supporters and his family held the town for many years. One of his descendants was Petronilla, she settled in Ware and lived in the Benedictine Priory (not the current priory) and ruled the town for 22 years. She changed the layout of the town so that it ran parallel to the river. From 1191 there was trouble at Ware as

the bridge was destroyed on three occasions by men from Hertford. The problem was settled in 1258 when it was agreed that this bridge, and the Thele bridge at Stanstead Abbots could remain but that tolls would need to be paid to the King.

By the 16th century the population of Ware was 1000 and there was still no mention of Hertford. From the 17th century Ware was a major stop on the coaching route from London, the south side of Water Row (now the High Street) consisted mainly of inns with over 25 in the town as a whole, among them was The White Hart dating back to medieval times and the original home of the Great Bed of Ware. One of five inns that housed the bed before it was taken to Rye House by Henry Teale in 1870.

Further problems arose between Ware and Hertford at the time of the 1832 Great Reform Bill. Hertford was entitled to elect two MP's and in 1831 two Whigs were elected. Local Tories released posters claiming that the Whigs had hired 'gangs of ruffians' to ensure that their candidates were elected. It was claimed that the vote had been rigged to make sure that Conservatives were elected, by giving the vote to all men from Hertford, not just property owners. There was no secret ballot and voting took place in front of the public, sometimes by men so drunk on alcohol provided by the candidates that they could not even pronounce their names. Although the Tories were elected they were thrown out the following year.

After answering questions from the audience David was thanked by the Chairman for an educational and very witty evening.

Terry Collins

The Poor Law in East Herts in the 17th Century

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Seventeenth century. They also built a Pest House where those suspected of having plague could stay.

Stanstead Abbots of course has both alms-houses and the Clock House which was once the local grammar school. Both of which were bequests of Sir Edward Baesh during the mid seventeenth century.

Many of the more wealthy left money for the poor in their wills, some of them stipulated that the poor had to

attend the donors funeral and so provide a good send off, others wanted the money to be given out as they were being buried.

Pauper apprentices were helped as it was quite often the case that when they were serving their seven year tenure they could be taken off the parish poor list. Some of the more unscrupulous employers were known to have apprenticed children



The Clock House formerly the Baesh Grammar School - an early Photograph

as young as seven for a period of twelve years. Boys were allowed to study up to the age of 21 and girls to 24.

In 1630 two poor harvests meant that the parishes had to prepare themselves for widespread poverty. Local JP's had to increase the poor rate and report their findings to the government. The local JP had to ensure that all local children were

working the youngest being spinners. But despite the failed harvest there was little increase in the overall death rates

During the Civil War many local parishes were effected by the so called 'wandering poor' moving from village to village and taking what they could, although often caught they were not always accused of theft or taken to court..

Alan concluded his talk by giving us details of where to find the sources for the vast amount of information. He followed this by taking a number of questions from an interested audience, and he was thanked by the Chairman.

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

May Friday 8th	AGM/ Talk Hidden Hertfordshire by Ann Marie Parker
June Friday 12th	St James Church History by Jonathon Trower
July Friday 10th	Markets Towns and Trade in Medieval Herts by Mark Bailey
August Sunday 16th	BBQ - Members Only.
September Friday 11th	Julian Grenfell - Hertfordshire's WW1 Poet by HALS
October Friday 9th	Quiz Night—Details to follow

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

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