

## WHAT WE WOULD HAVE SEEN.....

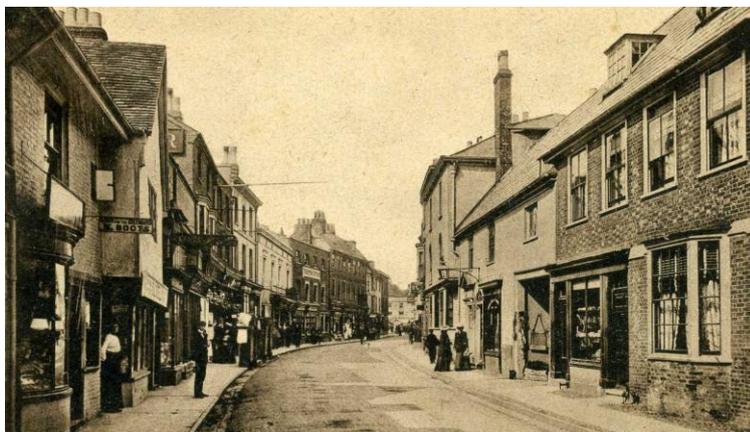
*if we had been able to visit*

*THE LINNEAN SOCIETY on 22<sup>nd</sup> April.*



Hitchin, by one of those odd quirks of history, has a very strong background in the history of the biology of plants. Local apothecary William Drage published his pioneering Practice of Physick in 1666; in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century Mark Hildesley, Vicar of Hitchin, kept a copy of Culpepper's Physick for the Common People (1652) available for public use; Richard Crofts was selling medicinal herbs on Hitchin Market by the 1840s and in 1846 Quaker businessman William Ransom founded his pharmaceutical chemists factory off Bancroft, aspects of whose operations continue today while the HHS itself remains responsible for the town's small but perfectly formed Physic Garden located at Paynes Park.

It is wholly fitting, therefore, that we should seek to visit the Linnean Society of London to learn more about its unique collections of specimens, art and documents related to the study of natural history and the biological sciences. The Society was founded in 1788 by Sir James Edward Smith who bought the collections of the Swedish naturalist and taxonomist Carl Linnaeus five years after Linnaeus' death in 1778. Sir James' initiative followed hard on the heels of Captain James Cook's three momentous voyages of exploration which brought the scientific study of the natural world before a much wider, and increasingly interested, public.



**Sun Street**

In addition Hitchin has its own important link to the Linnean Society. In 1821 Robert Bentley, the son of a Hitchin solicitor, was born in Sun Street where the Bella Vita is today. Robert was apprenticed to a druggist in Tunbridge Wells and this began a long and important career as a pharmaceutical chemist during which he became influential in the growth of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, a key

lecturer in botany at the Middlesex Hospital and, in 1849, a Fellow of the Linnean Society itself. His role was central to the development of pharmacognosy, the identification, collection and description of crude drugs and the natural conditions affecting medicinal plants. Robert's Medicinal Plants (with Henry Trimen), published between 1876-80, became and has remained a standard work.

We hope very much, therefore, that we will be able to revive the option of a visit to the Linnean Society during 2021. In the meantime the Society has digitised many of its holdings, including the Linnaeus Collection, which you can browse free on-line at [www.linnean-online.org](http://www.linnean-online.org)

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**Physic Garden, Hitchin**