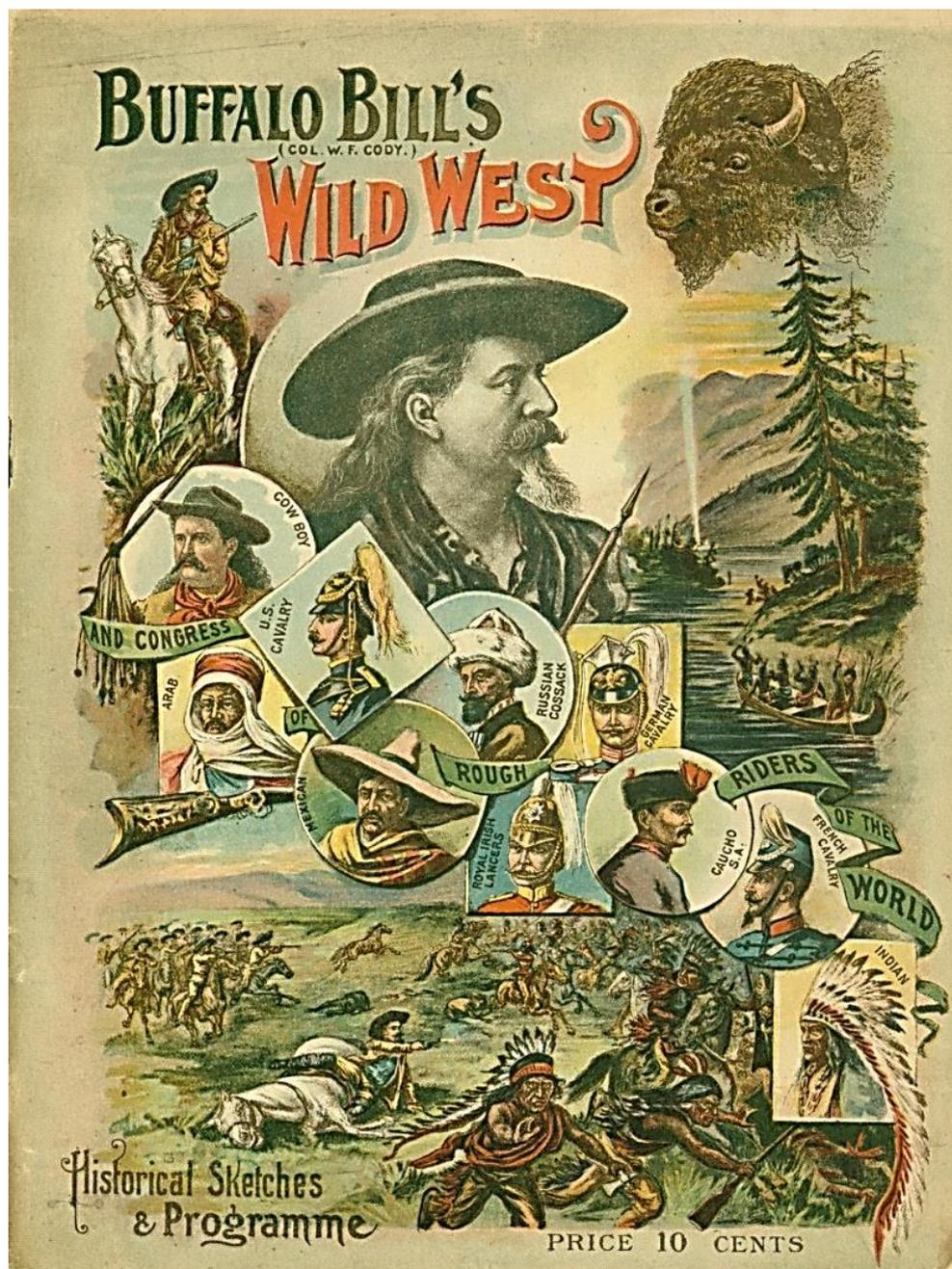


Volume 30 No. 2

September 2020

THE HITCHIN JOURNAL



A HITCHIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY PUBLICATION

Registered Charity No. 280746

THE HITCHIN JOURNAL

Volume 30 No. 2

September 2020

A HITCHIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY PUBLICATION

CONTENTS

Editorial	1
Field's Garage – the Takeover – Terry Wilson	2
Some Hitchin Buses – Terry Wilson	7
And Now for Something Completely Different – Simon Walker	10
Hitchin and the Temperance Movement – Simon Walker	13
Hitchin Warship Week, 1942 - Simon Walker	20
William Ranger's Report, 1849 - Simon Walker	24

THE HITCHIN JOURNAL

Volume 30 No. 2 September 2020

A HITCHIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY PUBLICATION

Editorial

If there is one thing that the pandemic has done, it's been to leave me with time on my hands. As a result, we (that is, Mike Clarke, his team and I) have been hard at work preparing a collection of items from old *Hitchin Journals* for publication as a book, entitled *Hitchin: Glimpses from the Past*. Publication should be in time for Christmas, so it will be an ideal gift (if that's not a hint, I don't know what is).

Choosing what to select proved really difficult. There will be something for everyone, I hope. This will be an ideal book for the bedside table, though not exclusively so. Think of it as a cabinet of curiosities. The content ranges from local heraldry, through memories of pre-Second World War – even pre-First World War – Hitchin, local ghosts, lost buildings, education, the workhouse, rural protest in the 19th century, the Cow Commoners, ice houses, the Swan with Two Necks (a pub), to Roman cookery... there are 87 articles in all. At the moment I am contemplating the daunting task of preparing the index!

Had I realised how much work it would involve, I might not have suggested it; but I did, so I have only myself to blame. A lot of work has gone into finding the images that were used at the time, or sourcing new ones to replace them.

There is a great deal more material – easily enough for a second volume – and so I'm working on that at the moment too.

Front Cover: In 1904 Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show came to Hitchin, and set up on Butts Close. It wasn't their first visit to Great Britain – they attended Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887. This poster is from the mid-1890s. My grandmother was thirteen years old in 1904, and I recall her telling me how exciting it was! The posters went up in advance of the show's arrival, by train, on 23 June. When the show was over, she was given a metal disc with a hole through it, allegedly shot through by Cody himself. Unfortunately she was unable to find it. It was probably just a washer in reality, but as a keepsake how she must have treasured it.

Field's Garage – the Takeover

In our last edition we published the late Terry Wilson's recollections of Field's Garage in Grove Road, up to the point of the takeover by Blox Services. Since then, I received the following communication from my old friend Harry Wright:

Dear Simon,

The article about Fields Garage brought back a plethora of memories of the business and some of the employees. However, may I point out one minor error?

On page 4, paragraph 5, reference is made to Hitchin Motor Company. This was actually Hitchin Motor Works. The owner was Dennis EDE not Mead as stated. I knew Dennis well, his brother Ivor worked in the Parts Dept., of Weston's Motors with my Dad. Ivor was also an excellent artist who died at a tragically young age. Dennis had a daughter Denise, who was a real tomboy, yet boys were attracted to her like bees to a honeypot.

Thanks for that, Harry.

We take up Terry's article at the point of takeover:

BLOX Services Take Over

by the late Terry "Tug" Wilson

About 1968/69 we were told we were to be taken over by Blox Services from Tooting London, part of Associated News Papers.

I think Den stayed a short time then moved to Suffolk as he could not open a new business locally. A management man from Blox by the name of Dave came and stayed among us getting to know what was what. Everything stayed the same for about a month then the word spread about redundancies. The word in the shop was, 'I've seen the list'.

Den employed about 12-15 people and about 6 others sort of self-employed hangers on. One man, Ken Bethel, was a sign writer he had hand sign written all the vehicles.

Two or three contracts were dropped, one was the towing of the Road Planer which the council used to take the top layer off the road ready for new tarmacking. The towing of this was pulled by a wrecker around Herts and Beds very regally, it had to be towed at about 20 mph so was most times a day's job.

One other job dropped was with a small wrecker pulling the roller over the Hitchin's Town football pitch; I often did both of these jobs.



Above: A Blox advertisement, advertising the takeover.

Decca Navigation¹ from Wymondley had their instrument caravans towed all over the country by a Field's wrecker, John Tomlin was second man on a tow to Land's End. I believe this job was dropped too. Don Piper the electrician was now the new workshop foreman.

Seven of us, myself included, were called in the office and told we could stay. All the others were paid off or left.

All our customers stayed with us plus new ones. One new contract was The Territorial Army from Luton. Most times they were brought to us but we took them back to Luton. These were large six wheeled Leyland lorries, scout cars and Land Rovers. They only came

¹ I can't resist mentioning a recollection about Decca Navigation. In about 1970, I was one of a group of four or five who were visiting a friend (Colin Hamilton) whose father was, as I recall, the manager there. Colin had his own flat on the premises, which was reached by walking past the guard dog's quarters. He (Caesar, the dog) got out while we were waiting for Colin in his flat, and by the time he got back we were pinned in the corner with a snarling Alsatian going mad in front of us. I've never been more afraid of a dog than I was at that moment, nor as pleased to see Colin...

to the garage for small jobs and lubrication. Even if the vehicle had not been used we still had to grease it again, lots of grease nipples.

We always had serviced Securicor's vehicles, but now we had more, they were collected and delivered back to Luton.

Blox had a large hire fleet South and North of London and a garage in Tooting. When they had a service overflow at Tooting two or three of us would go there and drive some vehicles back to Hitchin for service and in most cases repairs. At one time Tooting garage had a shortage of fitters, we were asked for volunteers to go and work there for a week, myself and Ray were heavily persuaded so we agreed, this meant leaving at 6 am driving to Tooting doing a day's work in the workshop then driving home about 5pm., this was Monday, the next day Tuesday, during the morning Mr Wright a director of Blox thanked us for volunteering to come and work there. We both said we were 'persuaded...' he asked if we want to come again and we said no, and we never went again, though once two of us took two vehicles back to Tooting and came back by train.

Blox had a contract at Watford Steam Laundry, one of our fitters was there all the time in their little garage, when he was sick or on holiday I would go there daily to cover his work, I went in my car.

Not much changed in the workshop or to the buildings.

This Blox ownership lasted about three years maybe. It was better when it was Fields.

Next just a little bit about Swans.

Swan Garage

John Pugh already had a garage at Weston called Pugh and Fields (no relation). He came to Hitchin and took over the Blox Services garage early 1970s; the garage now was called Swan Garage.

John was the boss and the workshop manager was Phil Shepherd. All the staff stayed there at that time. The manager was Peter Mobbs and assisted by Bill Elliot.

The comments in the shop were, 'it feels like a garage again not a business machine.'

All the customers stayed with Swans, and there were some new ones that he had brought from Weston. I never stayed there long, so I am unable to write much more about it.

They carried on doing heavy recovery, AA and RAC work. One of Swans' recovery jobs after I left was the moving of their lorries from BOC Letchworth Depot after the explosion there in 1975.

Swans opened a new Tachograph Centre on site, I think maybe early or mid-80s.

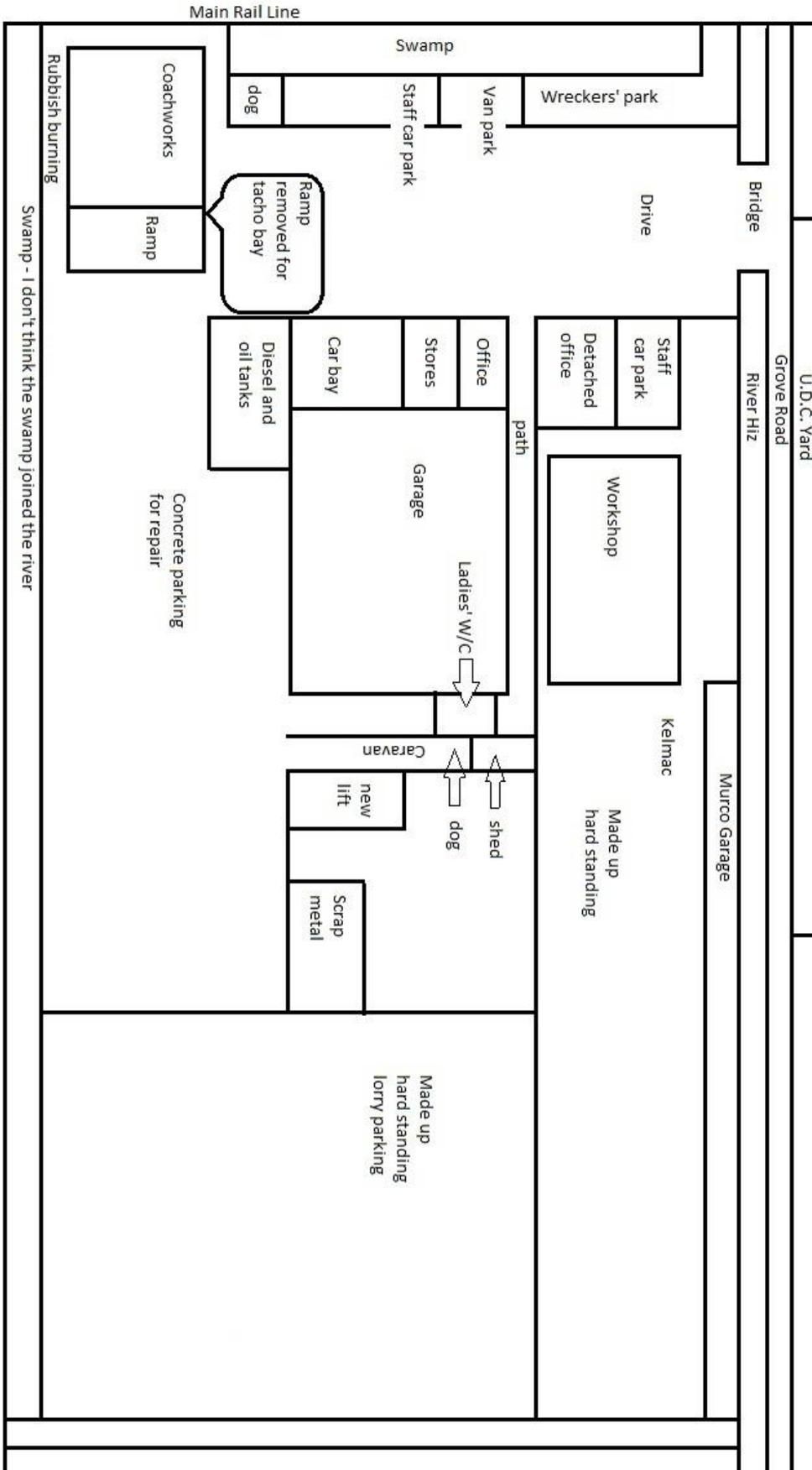
The coachwork building was extended on the left hand side, looking from the road. This had a pit, a rolling road and all the equipment needed to calibrate tachographs to Ministry's requirements. If a speedo cable had been removed during a gearbox repair job then the vehicle had to go to the centre to be resealed. The tachograph function is an M.O.T. requirement.

Right and below: the aftermath of the BOC explosion in 1975. A good deal of damage seems to have been done.

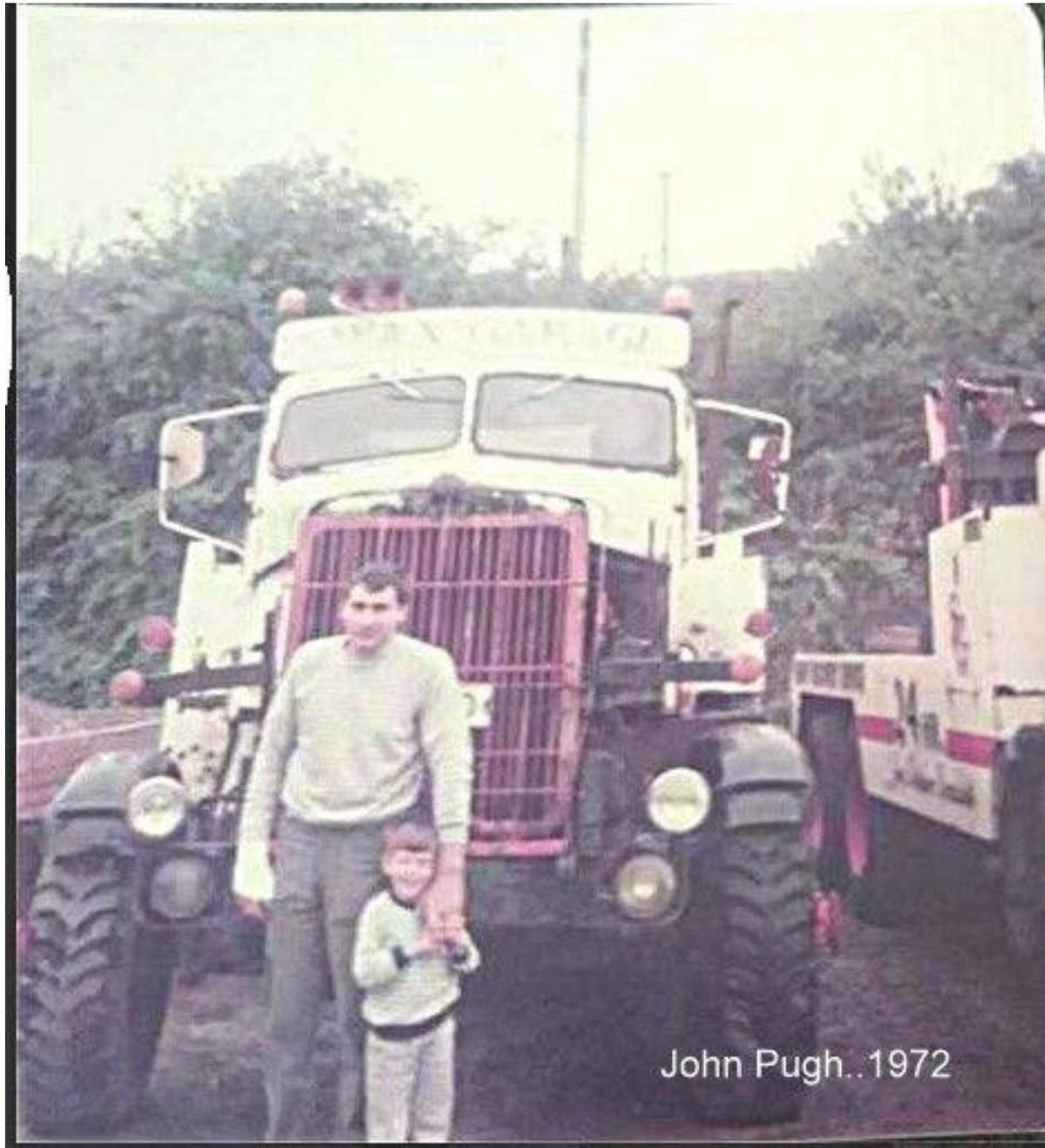


The pit was needed to remove and fit speedo cables and get access to the gearboxes. The lorries were reversed into the bay and on to the rollers. The steam cleaning ramp was removed so to accommodate the extension. A new lift ramp for the steam cleaning was positioned near the compound.

Don Piper and Roger Howard left to set up their own businesses.



Above: The layout of the Garage (Terry Wilson/Simon Walker)



*Above: John Pugh, who took over from Blox, stands in front of a Swan Garage tow truck.
(Terry Wilson)*



Some Hitchin Buses

In addition to the Fields/Blox/Swan Garage article, Terry Wilson also gave me some pictures of Hitchin buses. I freely admit that I know very little about buses, so I turned to Stephen Bradford-Best for information. He was in Florida at the time I contacted him, but he still managed to identify them all. Phil Rowe was able to add further details.



Above: Three London Transport buses parked on St Mary's Square, in front of Moss's pie factory in Portmill Lane, between 1948-53. They are local services: Route 386A to Buntingford is an AEC Regal T Class (more commonly used on Green Line services) - a single deck version of the RT double deck. The buses on the right are Leyland Cubs. This is at the north end of St Mary's Square, in the area opposite Woodcote House. Below: Again, on St Mary's Square, probably the 1950s: two London Transport built AEC RFs, both Route 383 to Weston. A red RF on this service is unusual; it is MLL 962, which was on loan to LT Stevenage from December 1966 to January 1970.



Right: Route 329A to Knebworth (via Langley) is a London Transport designed Guy Special GS single deck (as used via Walsworth to Weston in this period). This vehicle was built in 1953, and first registered in December of that year; it's still running today. Its diesel engine has a capacity is 7630 cc. It's not clear when the photograph was taken, but it is relatively recent.



Above: Probably St Mary's Square again, this time in the 1970s: Routes 303A Welwyn Garden City and 340B New Barnet are both AEC SMs or Swifts, branded in London Country livery. First introduced in 1969, they were not a successful bus. (N.B. London Country branding started in 1970)



And Now For Something Completely Different...

...bottles! I chanced upon a bottle marked W Webb Hitchin the other day, so I bought it.



Above: William Webb's bottle. It is marked W WEBB on one side, and HITCHIN on the other. Date? C.1860. (Author)

Bottles are a bit of a mystery to me, so I did a bit of research. This type of bottle is often referred to as a Hamilton bottle. They had cork stoppers, and it has been suggested that the reason for the shape is to ensure that the cork cannot dry out and shrink. The bottle could then leak, or its contents go flat.

I wondered who W Webb was, and where he lived; and whether he had just the one style of bottle made, or perhaps more. I did what I usually do at a time like this, and cheated by asking someone else.

Bottle shape first: Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews of N.H. Museum Service provided me with a picture of a bottle in their collection of a quite different shape, but also marked W Webb.



Above: the W. Webb bottle in the collection of N H Museum Service (Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews).

And now the man himself:¹

1841	William Webb, The Folly Houses
1851	William Webb, Back Street (east side), ginger beer manufacturer, born 1812, with his spouse Fanny.
1855	William Webb, Back Street, ginger beer manufacturer.
1861	William Webb, 42, victualler; wife Fanny, 55; boarder John Street, widower, 73, bricklayer's labourer; servant George Buckingham, u, 21, ginger beer maker, all born Hitchin. [George Buckingham also appears as living at The Folly with his 42 year old mother Betty Buckingham, a straw plaiter, born at Gravenhurst.]
1871	William Webb, 39 Hitchin Hill – the Wellington pub. Age 59, soda water maker, Hitchin; wife Fanny, 66, soda water maker's wife; sister Mary Kench, 67, born Wyombley, Herts [Wymondley?]
1878	William Webb, beer retailer, Hitchin Hill
1882	Charles Webb junior, beer retailer, Hitchin Hill
1886	William Webb, beer retailer, Hitchin Hill

This shape is sometimes called a Hamilton bottle, but this may be a misnomer. Hiram Codd first patented his ball-stopper idea in England on November 24, 1870, and followed up with British patents in 1871 and 1872, and U.S. patents in 1872 and 1873. The bottles were most popular in England and other British Commonwealth countries,

¹ Information from Pauline Humphries and Alan Fleck, from Exploring Hitchin II.

especially Canada, Australia, and India. They worked by using of the internal pressure within the bottle, which forced the marble in the neck against a rubber seal at the neck.



Above: a Codd bottle, made for William Lucas of Hitchin, in the last quarter of the 19th century. It was given to me by Pauline Humphries. (Author)

In England, in 1879, Henry Barrett invented the screw top beer bottle. It was a cheap and reusable container that meant little or no waste.

Below: a screw top bottle made for Fordhams of Ashwell. (Author)



After the invention the crown cork in the USA in 1892, use of the screw-topped beer bottle declined; though they were still used for quart bottles, where the customer might want to reseal the container in order to have some more beer later. I remember them still being in use as late as the 1970s.

The crown cap is now ubiquitous for beer bottles, though metal screw caps are common for other bottles, including wine in many cases.

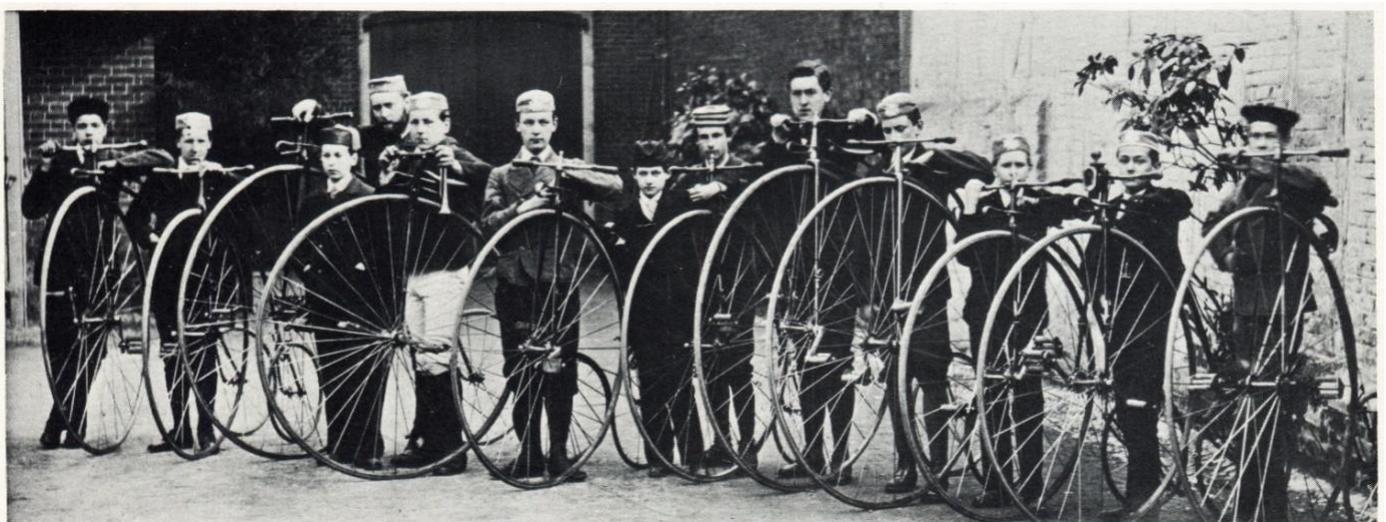


Above: modern crown caps, with an old Schveppes bottle opener. (Author)



Hitchin and the Temperance Movement

Here's an interesting photograph that came my way recently:¹



According to the seller, it shows the Hitchin Temperance Brigade with penny-farthing bicycles in 1876. The date is right for the cycles, being after the development of the penny-

¹ Okay, I bought it on eBay.

farthing in the 1870s and before its demise about 20 years later, supplanted by the Rover safety bicycle. It got me thinking about temperance movements, though.

In 1832 a group of working men from Preston, Lancashire signed a pledge to renounce alcohol; other groups followed suit, and in 1835 the British Association for the Promotion of Temperance was formed.

In 1847 the Band of Hope was founded in Leeds. The organization's juvenile members abstained from all alcohol, other than in medicines.

The Church of England Temperance Society, which had roots in the Anglo-Catholic tradition, was founded in 1862.

The Salvation Army (founded in 1864) was strongly temperance.²

Right: General Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, visits Hitchin (Author's collection).



² "The Salvation Army encourages an alcohol free lifestyle as a way of enhancing the wellbeing and health of all people. As a witness to this, Salvation Army soldiers choose to live an alcohol free life."

<https://www.salvationarmy.org/ihq/ipsalcoholinsociety> retrieved 15 April 2020



Left: a Church of England Temperance pendant. One side reads "CHURCH OF ENGLAND TEMPERANCE SOCIETY"; the reverse, "WHETHER YE EAT OR DRINK DO ALL TO THE GLORY OF GOD." (Author's collection).

The League of the Cross was a Catholic total-abstinence organisation founded in 1873; in 1876 the British Women's Temperance Association was formed to persuade men to stop drinking; in the 1880s the American Gospel Temperance or Blue Ribbon movement sent emissaries to Great Britain.

The temperance societies continued to flourish, with temperance tea shops and hotels being established.

Temperance societies sprang up in both the army and navy.

Other organisations supported the cause: Nonconformist groups, including Methodists and Quakers, lobbied parliament to restrict alcohol sales.

Arguments raged back and forth: in Hitchin, the Reverend L Hensley read a sermon that included the following passage:

"How can we count men Christ's servants who are slaves to drink? It is so easy to make polite excuses for it; it is so hard to speak the plain truth about the conduct of others, which you know perhaps only by hearsay. But how can men be so blind to that which they know of themselves? How can they endure that separation from their God which they know to be caused by this sin? Why do they not take at once the bold step of giving up all strong drink whatsoever, and putting an absolute barrier between themselves and the enemy which they know will destroy them in the end?"

At the Tilehouse Street Baptist Church however the Rev. F.G. Marchant took a different view:

"Frequent reference was made in God's Word of wine being given for joy and gladness. How repeatedly was it stated that God would bless the corn and the wine and the oil; thus showing that they were regarded, if not as necessities of life, as things which God gave to His people for their enjoyment. They had heard it said that moderate drinkers

were "as bad as, or worse than drunkards," but how could it be right for men to speak in this way when God has spoken of wine as a blessing wherewith he would bless the land?"³

The arguments rumbled on. Meanwhile, establishments were set up to cater for the market; Kelly's Directory of Hertfordshire for 1894 lists

Hunt James Terry, temperance hotel & Workman's hall, Brand street

(the following entry is for Hunt, William, beer retailer, 22 Queen street!)

Leete Simeon, temperance hotel, 94 Walsworth road

(the following entry is for Lemon, Reuben, Black Lion P.H. 92 Queen street)

The directory for 1902 has

Hunt, James Terry, Brand st. Hitchin

Leete Simeon, temperance hotel, 94 Walsworth road

And in 1914 we find that there are now four temperance premises:

- *The Workman's Hall, in Brand street, contains several rooms used for committees, lectures and concerts, largely under the auspices of the Friends' Adult school; attached to it is the Blue Cross Temperance Brigade gymnasium and reading rooms.*
- *Hill's Temperance Hotel (Walt. Parsons, propr.), Brand street*
- *Leete Gertrude (Miss), temperance hotl. 94 Walsworth rd*
- *Pratt Reginald, temperance hotel, Triangle*
- *Tabner Wm. 47 Walsworth rd. Hitchin⁴*

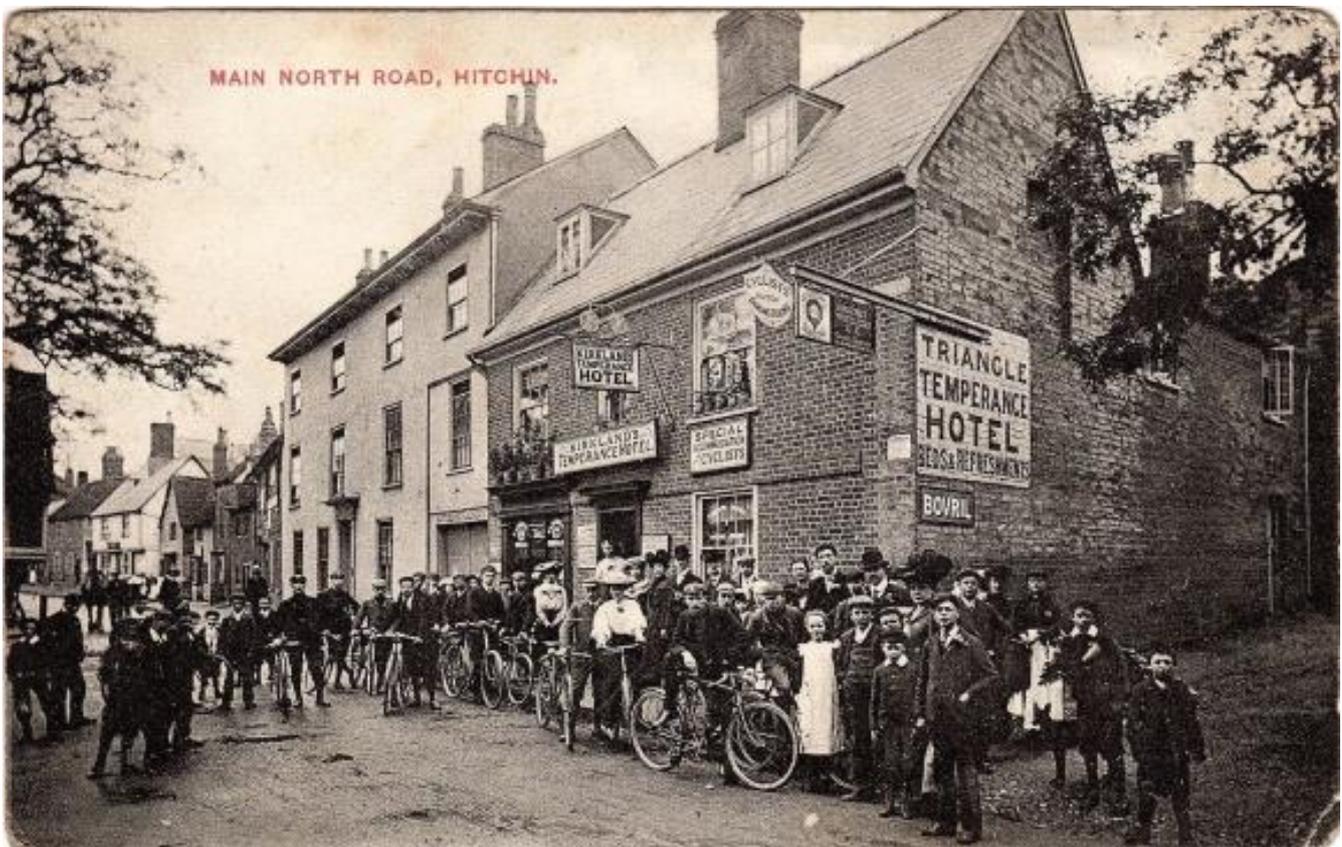
Prohibition in the United States banned the production, importation, transportation, and sale of alcoholic beverages from 1920 to 1933. Initially this gave temperance societies overseas a boost, but its failure, both to stop the importation and production of alcohol, and the crime and racketeering that sprang from it, damaged the cause of temperance everywhere. That is not to say that they disappeared overnight; but the days of mass rallies were over.

³ Lawson Thompson Scrapbook, Vol 2B, p.167, North Herts Museum Service.

⁴ No. 47 Walsworth Road is on the NHDC list of buildings of local historical interest. Built c. 1860, it is thought to be one of the first concrete houses. It has (or had) a concrete bath.

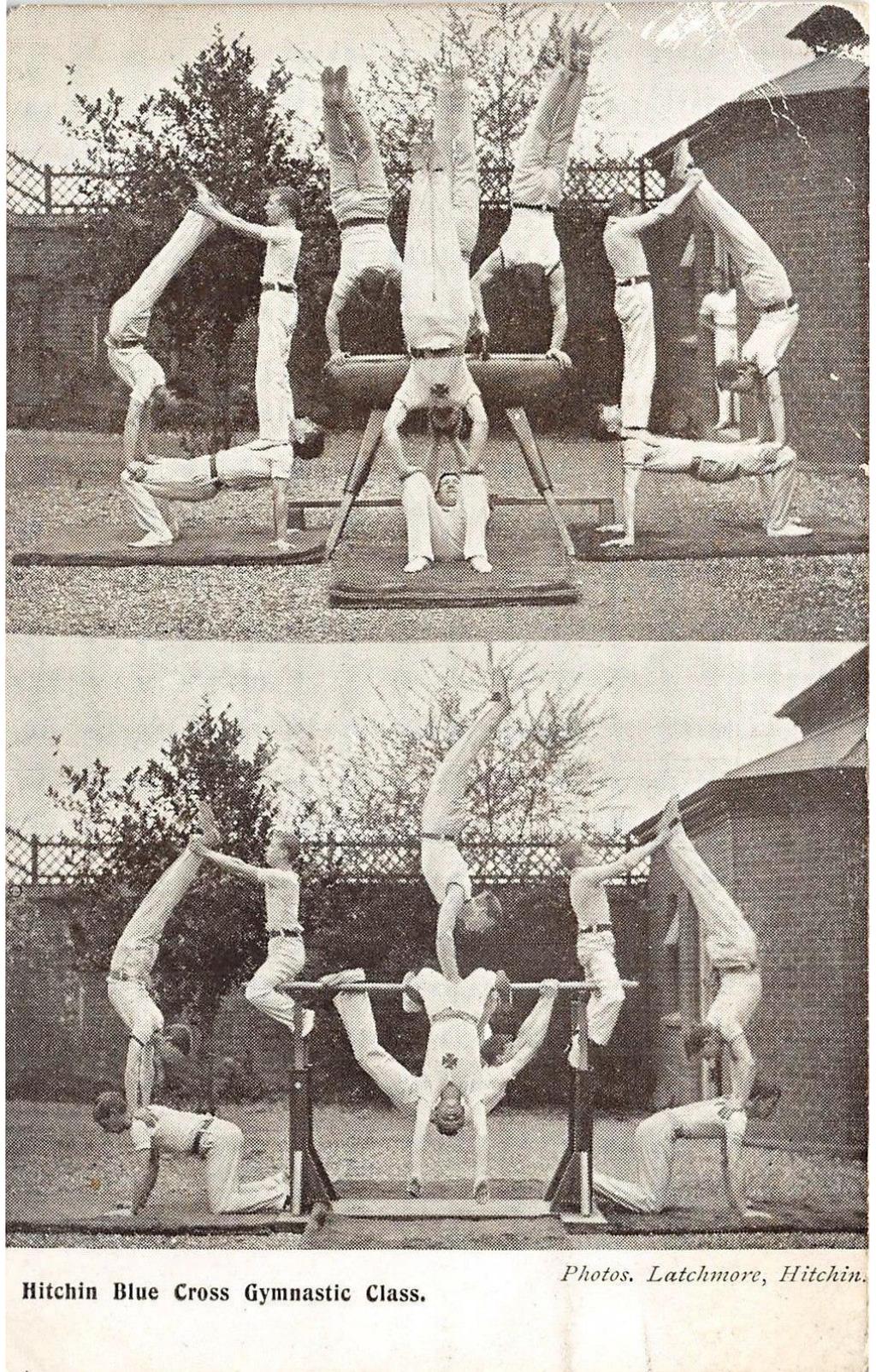


Above, Brand Street c.1909. Centre is the Coffee Rooms and Temperance Hotel, next door but one from the Dog Inn. Below, cyclists at the Triangle Temperance Hotel, at the junction of Bridge Street and Queen Street. (author's collection)



The Blue Cross Temperance Brigade seems to have been very active In Hitchin, with the emphasis being on healthy sports. Athletics, football, cycling and cricket teams were, at one time or another, active and sometimes quite successful.

*Right: the Hitchin
Blue Cross
Temperance Brigade
Gymnastic team.
(North Hertfordshire
Museum Service)*



Hitchin Blue Cross Gymnastic Class.

Photos. Latchmore, Hitchin.

Hitchin Blue Cross Temperance Brigade's football team beat the Hitchin Reserves 3 – 0 on 15 December 1894; they were less successful against the first team however, and on 4 April 1896 they lost 6 – 0.⁵ They were more successful in 1902, when they held Hitchin to a 1-1 draw met at Top Field.⁶



Blue Cross Temperance Brigade Cricket XI, no date, but perhaps c.1920? (North Hertfordshire Museum Service)

That is not to say that they were always a kind and forgiving group, as an item in the Hertfordshire Mercury of 17 March 1906 demonstrates:

PETTY SESSIONS : THEFT OF TWO COATS

Annie Walker, a married woman, was charged with stealing two overcoats, one the property of Henry Hinstridge, and the other belonging to William Darton, at Hitchin, on March 10th. The prosecutors are members of the Blue Cross Temperance Brigade. They went into the Brigade's Gymnasium on Saturday evening, leaving their overcoats in the porch.

⁵ <https://hitchintownfc.club/phpbb/viewtopic.php?f=2&t=2276> retrieved 12 April 2020

⁶ <https://hitchintownfc.club/the-key-moments/#1524065432542-7ee8560b-8cbb> retrieved 12 April 2020

The coats were missed shortly after and the police were informed. On the same evening the defendant offered one of the coats for sale for a shilling, saying she wanted to get some food for her children on Sunday. She could not sell it however. Next day on being spoken to by the police she handed over the two coats, saying she bought them from a stranger on Saturday evening for sixpence. The defendant made a similar statement now, strongly denying the charge of theft. She was sentenced to 21 days' imprisonment, the Chairman reminding her that she had been punished for a like offence before.⁷



Hitchin Warship Week, 1942

Warship Weeks were held in order to raise funds for new vessels, often to replace those lost to enemy action. In March 1942 appeals appeared in the newspapers for savings to be put towards *HMS Cossack*, torpedoed by a German submarine (U563). Despite efforts to tow her to Gibraltar, she sank in bad weather on 27 October 1941 with the loss of 159 lives.



Above: *HMS Cossack*, pre-war. Photograph FL 1657 from the collections of the Imperial War Museums (collection no. 8308-29 [1]).

⁷ https://www.hertspastpolicing.org.uk/content/crimes_and_incidents/theft/petty-sessions-theft-of-two-coats retrieved 12 April 2020. I am grateful to Hertfordshire Constabulary Historical Society for this cutting.

HMS Cossack was a Tribal Class destroyer, and had been the vessel that liberated British seamen from the German supply vessel *Altmark* in Norwegian waters in 1940. She also participated in the Norwegian campaign later that year, and in the operation to locate and destroy the German battleship *Bismark* in 1941.

IMAGINE THIS IN HITCHIN!



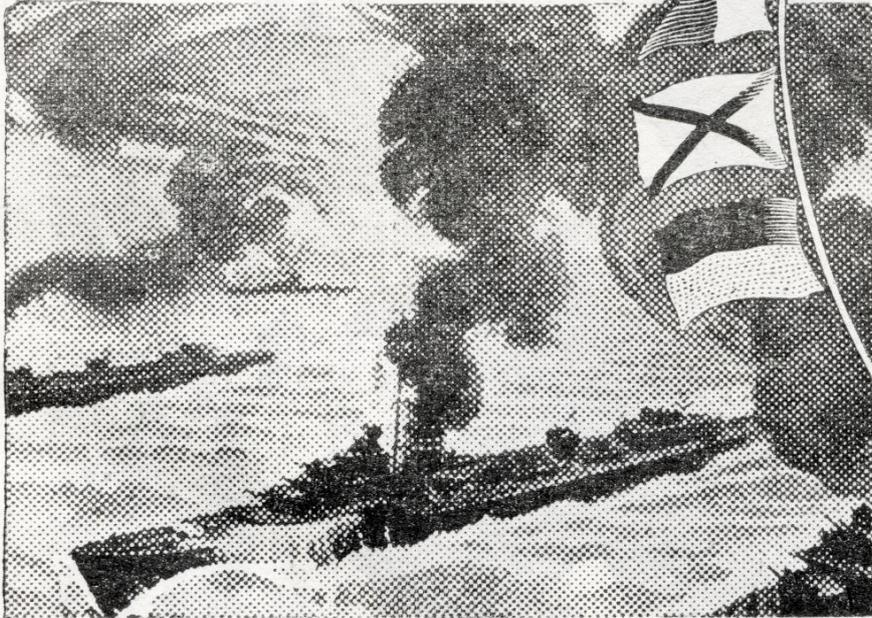
The *Cossack* and her gallant men helped to save you from this . . .

NOW SAVE for the NEW COSSACK
 AND LET HER CARRY ON THE GOOD WORK
HITCHIN WARSHIP WEEK
£210,000 WANTED. It's up to YOU!

This space kindly given by G. B. Christie, Ltd., Wines & Spirits Merchants, 3, Baneroff,
 Hitchin

Above: the appeal for funds, from the Hitchin Pictorial, 17 March 1942 (author's collection)

The signal is **SAVE**



**INVEST ALL
YOU CAN IN**

3% Savings Bonds

**2½% National
War Bonds**

3% Defence Bonds

**Savings
Certificates**

**Post Office
Savings Bank**

for
HITCHIN'S WARSHIP WEEK

Put the same tremendous effort into our Warship Week as the Sailors are putting into their job for you. The men of the Navy are sacrificing much for you—now is YOUR chance to make a sacrifice for them—during this week.

LEND TO THE LIMIT!

This space kindly donated by Notts (Caterers), Ltd., 3, High Street. Hitchin

Above: a second advertisement for savings towards a replacement for HMS Cossack, from the Hitchin Pictorial, 17 March 1942 (author's collection)

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25th

COOKERY DEMONSTRATION, Hermitage Hall, 3 p.m. Mable Simons, Herts. County Council Demonstrator. The Hon. Mrs. J. F. Harrison will speak. Cake Competition (Recipes, etc., available at the Selling Centre, 9 Market Place).

THURSDAY, MARCH 26th

WOMEN'S PARTY, British Restaurant, Market Place, 3.15 p.m. to 5 p.m. Hostess, Mrs. Delmé-Radcliffe; Speaker, Mrs. Frank Hall, M.B.E., of the National Savings Committee. Music by R.A. Dance Band (by kind permission of the Officer Commanding). Tea 9d. Tickets from Savings Centre.

WHIST DRIVE, Corn Exchange, 8 p.m. Certificates as Prizes. Organised by Hitchin Civil Defence Sports and Social Club.

FRIDAY, MARCH 27th

DANCE, Hermitage Hall, organised by G. W. King, Ltd., Sports Club, 3.0 (1/- refunded in Savings Stamps). Harry Phillips' Band.

SATURDAY, MARCH 28th

GRAND PARADE and DISPLAY, St. Mary's Square, 2 p.m., by Sea Cadet Units from Hitchin, Edware (with gun), Watford and Deptford (with gun), and by a Detachment of the R.A. (by kind permission of the Officer Commanding). Admiral Sir Lionel Halsey, G.C.M.G., will take Division, 2.30. Gun Drill, by the Sea Cadets until 4.15, followed by a gun display by the R.A. Unit till 5 p.m. Military Band.

FINAL RALLY on Market Place, 6.15 p.m., Sea Cadets, Military Band, Group News. The Final Figure.

DISTRIBUTION OF SCHOOLS' EXHIBITION PRIZES by Mrs. Delmé-Radcliffe, the Old Art Room, Bancroft, 11 a.m.

Your **SELLING CENTRES** are at:— **NICHOLLS**, Bancroft; **SPURRS**, Market Place. Open 10 a.m. Saturday, March 21st. (Hours coincide with shopping hours).

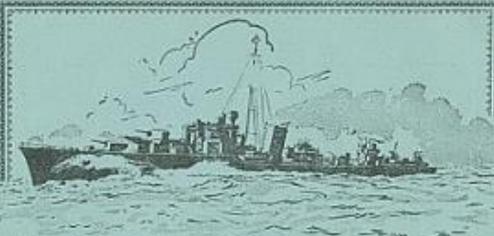
SAVINGS CENTRE, 10 Market Place, 6 p.m. to 7.30 p.m., Daily except Wednesday.

From **H.M.S. Hitchin**, which will be moored at the river steps on St. Mary's Square, 6d. and 2/6 Savings Stamps may also be purchased.

Make this your Victory Week!

Wm. Gilling & Co., Ltd., Printers, Hitchin.

M 7818 81



HITCHIN WARSHIP WEEK
MARCH 21st—28th.

£210,000 is Needed
to Replace the Hull
of Your Warship

The Famous "Cossack" is Hitchin's Warship Week "Target." It gave many glorious pages to our Naval History and the British People took it to their hearts. Help to build the new "Cossack" and so make good the loss.

PRICE TWOPENCE

Above: a leaflet for Warship Week from the collection of North Hertfordshire Museum Service, object no. 7818.

A large model warship, HMS *Hitchin*, was moored by the river steps on St Mary's Square, from which 6d and 2s 6d (2½ p and 12 ½p) savings stamps could be purchased.

Right: HMS *Hitchin*, from the Hitchin Pictorial, 17 March 1942 (author's collection)



The replacement for HMS *Cossack* was a Royal Navy C-class destroyer, also named HMS *Cossack*; she was launched on 10 May 1944, survived the war, and was scrapped in 1961.



Eight Extensive Furnishing Showrooms.



Where to Furnish.

JOHN GATWARD & SONS, Ltd., HITCHIN.

Above: A Gatward advertisement from 1902. Gatwards occupied the premises that now form the Arcade; before that, the premises housed the Swan Inn.



William Ranger's Report 1849¹

Simon Walker

The Public Health Act of 1848 established a Central Board of Health, but this had limited powers and no money. Those boroughs that had already formed a Corporation, such as Sunderland, were to assume responsibility for drainage, water supplies, removal of nuisances and paving. Loans (which were to be paid back from the rates) could be made for public health infrastructure. Where the death rate was above 23 per 1000, local Boards of Health had to be set up.

¹ Report to the General Board of Health on a Preliminary Enquiry into the Sewerage, Drainage, and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Town of HITCHIN, in the County of Herts. By WILLIAM RANGER, Superintending Inspector. London, July 10th, 1849.

Hitchin was one of the early towns to apply and, as a result, William Ranger, Superintending Inspector of the General Board of Health visited the town on 2 May 1849; he took evidence over the next few days. His report to the General Board led to the formation of Hitchin Local Board.

Some of the sections are quite well known, but there are parts of it that I knew little about until I read it through from beginning to end. Here is a sample of the better-known sections; I wouldn't read this whilst eating my dinner – you have been warned...

VENTILATION AND OVERCROWDING.—Mr. Foster represented the street ventilation as generally good, and the district not subject to fogs, but the internal ventilation as decidedly bad; that no less than 183 cottages contained only one bed-room in each, and overcrowding prevailed to a fearful extent, in consequence of the system adopted in this town of under-letting.

From a return made by the Sanitary Committee of 1,057 houses, 338 are deficient of any outlets at back, whilst the following examples are given illustrative of the overcrowding : -

In *Davis's-alley*, containing 7 houses, a family, consisting of 7 persons, occupy one small room, without any outlet at back or means of ventilation, for sleeping.

Seymour's-alley is approached by a covered passage, and consists of 7 houses ; in one, a man, wife, and three daughters, each 23, 20, and 18 years of age, sleep in one small room.

Chapman's-yard contains 17 houses, without any outlets at back, reached by means of a covered passage. The number of persons in 6 of these houses varies from 7 to 10 in each, and in one, a man, with 4 children, occupy one small room for sleeping ; a girl, 16 years of age, sleeping with three of her brothers; the eldest 18.

In *Hollow-lane*, containing 24 houses, 8 only having outlets at back, a family, consisting of 13 persons, reside in a house containing but two sleeping- rooms; and, in other houses, the number varies from 7 to 9 persons, with but one sleeping-room in each house.

In *Whitney's-cottages*, the families, consisting of 7 to 9 persons, have but one sleeping-room for each family.

Langford's-cottages.—11 in number, and in 3 the families vary from 8 to 11 persons respectively, each having but one small sleeping-room. In one of these places, a man, wife, and 7 children reside, sleeping in one room; the eldest 21 years of age. In a second house, a man, wife, and 7 children, the two eldest a girl and boy, 13 and 16 years of age, sleep in one small room, and that one in a filthy state.

Whiting's-cottages. - 14 in number, without any outlets at back or other means of ventilation, with one sleeping-room to each. The number of persons sleeping in one room are 7, and in another, it was stated, a woman, with 4 children, and two women lodgers, slept in one room; whilst in another of these houses, a man, wife, and 7 children sleep in a room 12 feet square; window opening 1 foot 9 inches by 1 foot 2 inches.

Carter's -yard contains 4 houses, but no outlet at back ; in one of these, a family of 10 persons reside, *i.e.*, man, wife, and 8 children ; having only one small sleeping-room 12

feet by 11 feet by 7 feet ; the three eldest consisting of a girl, boy, and girl, of the respective ages of 21, 20, and 16 years; the fourth, also, a girl, 14 years of age.

The above form only a portion of the cases where overcrowding and want of ventilation prevail in this town, and the major part thereof in a deplorable state. It is however, an act of justice to some of the owners who have recently come into possession of a portion of the property it has been my duty to describe, to state, that a spontaneous desire was shown on their part to remedy existing evils, by rendering the houses fit habitations for human beings. It is to be hoped that other owners will adopt a similar course on behalf of themselves and their poorer neighbours or tenants, as the case may be.

PRESENT WATER SUPPLY. - The inhabitants at present obtain their supply of water in three different ways, from draw-wells, by means of pumps, and from the river. The total number of pumps in the town, public and private, is estimated at 357, and of wells 92 ; and the distances from which many persons have to fetch water, for want of either pumps or wells on their own promises, are, in several instances, 50 yards, and in others, 40 and 20 yards ; but those residing on the sides of the river avail themselves of the latter source by dipping; the dipping-place itself being in close proximity to privies and outfalls of drains.

Mr. R. Newton, a master plumber, stated that the average annual cost for repairs of pumps has been about 6s. each, whilst the first cost of pumps averages 7*l.*² each for plumbers' work alone.

Taking the total number of houses at 1,057, it follows that the occupiers of no less than 608 houses are obliged to fetch water from various distances, whilst in 92 cases they are obliged to draw their supplies from wells, varying in depth. In the course of my inquiry it was stated that some of the wells were rendered useless, in consequence of percolations from privy pits.

In addition, Ranger reported on drainage – privies, cesspools:

In *Market-place*, there are eight privies in cellars, and five houses in which the occupiers make use of boxes.

In *Corries-yard*, there are five privies with soil-pits, for the use of 109 persons ; the drains pass through one of these privies, which is described by the inhabitants as frequently overflowing, the soil being swilled into the street.

In *Bridge-street*, there are 20 privies to 31 houses; the soil from 14 is deposited in cesspools, from 6 it is discharged into the river, near to where the inhabitants abstract water for drinking and domestic purposes: but three of the houses are destitute of privy accommodation of any kind.

Boot-yard, two privies to eight houses, inhabited by 41 persons.

Davis'-alley, two houses without privies, or any other accommodation.

² The report uses the symbol *l*, an italic lowercase L, for pounds sterling. For shillings, an italic lower case S, and for pence an italic lowercase D. The £ symbol rarely appears.

In *Back-street*, the privy soil from 22 privies is emptied into dung-pits; the privies in this place are used in common, the average being four houses to one privy.

In *Thorpe's-alley*, there are two privies to 10 houses, occupied by 41 persons, the soil from one privy flowing into a dung-pit.

Seymour's-alley contains six houses, occupied by 25 persons, having no privy accommodation of any kind.

In *Chapman's-yard*, there are two privies to 17 houses, occupied by 90 persons; the soil is discharged into the river, over which the two privies are built.

Hewitt's-yard contains 26 houses occupied by 129 persons, with but three privies, the soil is discharged into the river, over which the privies stand.

In *Hollow-lane*, there are four privies to 24 houses, occupied by 136 persons. These privies are used in common by the occupiers of 20 houses ; the inhabitants of the remaining four houses have no privies.

Course's-yard. - One privy to five houses.

Whitney's-cottages. - One privy to 14 houses, occupied by 75 persons.

Chapman's-cottages. - One Privy to 10 houses.

Waton's-cottages. - One privy to 7 houses.

Langford's-cottages. - One privy to 11 houses.

In *Tilehouse-street*, two houses without any privy accommodation.

The soil from four privies and five water-closets in this street is discharged into the river, and from four into open dung-pits.

In *Hollow-lane*, *Collier Town's end*, *Old Park-row*, *Hall's-yard*, *Silver-street*, *Whimbush-lane*, *Walsworth-road*, *Hitchin-hill*, *the Folly*, many of the privies communicate with open dung-pits, into which the soil is discharged, and from other parts it is discharged into the river.

In some instances the privies stand close to the windows and doors of dwellings, as in the instance of *Hall's* and other yards, where fever has proved fatal ; in others, the soil-pits are open and exposed.

SYSTEM OF SOIL-PITS - The adoption of privy pits is most objectionable, as it naturally favours the accumulation of soil even to overflowing, to the prejudice of health and generation of disease ; parties ever feeling reluctant to incur periodically the present heavy expense for emptying these places.

Mr. R. Newton observed, that the cost in this town for emptying privy pits alone amounts generally to sums varying from 10s. to 21s. per annum for the better class of houses.

The poorer class assured me in the course of my inspection, in many cases, that they pay at the rate of 3s. per annum per house. And where the privies are in cellars, the cost amounts to 1s. per month ; hence, when they are short of money, as frequently happens, the soil overflows, and either runs into the yards or down the open drains, and in some cases, into the ditches and water-courses, where it remains stagnant, circumstances tending to induce parties to connect their privies with open dung-pits, or with the river, according to the proximity of their premises.

Mr. Newton stated that the present cost of erecting water-closets, of which there are about 59 in the town, for plumbers' work alone amounts to 10*l.*, and for wood-work, from 3*l.* to 5*l.* more, and for repairs, about 5*s.* per closet annually.

NUISANCES AND REMOVAL OF REFUSE FROM THE TOWN. - Experience teaches that disease concentrates its force in the vicinity of stagnant ponds, filthy ditches, and accumulations of decaying animal and vegetable matter. The following premises are subject to one or other of these conditions : -

Chapman's Cottages. - The yard is described as being filthy, and the habits of the people exceedingly dirty, neglecting the use of a privy and throwing the excrement upon the yard, with which it is covered.

In *Parker's-yard, Bucklersbury*, there is a farm-yard and slaughter-house, with a pool of stagnant water, receiving the most valuable portion of drainage from dung ; and a second farm-yard and slaughter-house in *Parcell's-yard*.

Langford's-yard is represented as very confined, and the effluvium arising from a dung-pit receiving the excrements from privies most offensive.

On the west side of *Back-street* the liquid manure from a farm-yard permeates the walls of the Biggin houses, occupied by 18 women, one of whom stated that she had never been well since the date of her entrance, now about five years. The lower parts of the house are constantly moist from the soakage, the farmer in the mean time losing the most valuable portion of his manure.

Hall's-yard is described in the return from the Union as one of the seats of typhus fever. Pigs are kept on these premises, and the smell arising from slaughter-house offal and the dung is most offensive to the inhabitants residing in the vicinity, more particularly when the dung is removed.

There are numerous other yards in different parts of the town where pigs and other animals are kept, and manure is manufactured in the proximity of houses, forming the seats of malignant typhus fever. The clerk of the Union states, in his communication, "Typhus fever has been epidemic in almost every street," whilst it has chiefly prevailed in the dwellings situate as above described. In other parts the drainage is into open ditches, where the sewage lies stagnant, or into cesspools, partly covered and partly open : these are described by the inhabitants as being very offensive. In some cases there is an entire absence of any drains or other means of carrying off the sewage.

There is more, much of it less well known, but equally as interesting; the fire brigade and horticulture for example. I'll look at that in the next edition.



The Hitchin Journal is the magazine of the Hitchin Historical Society. It is intended as a medium for publication of articles and the exchange of information from both members and non-members.

Contributions are welcome, and should be submitted for consideration to the Editor (contact details below).

Whilst contributors are free to express their own views, these do not necessarily coincide with those of Hitchin Historical Society.

Principal Officers of Hitchin Historical Society

Chairman

Treasurer John Skeeles
1a Bearton Green
Hitchin (01462 433284)
john.skeeles@ntlworld.com

Secretary Pam Skeggs
The Foundry House, St Ippolyts,
Hitchin (01462 458135)
secretary@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk

Programme
Secretary David Howlett
15 Coleridge Close
Hitchin (01462 434539)
dhowlett@ymail.com

Membership
Secretary Membership enquiries to
membership@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk

Hitchin Journal
Editor Simon Walker
29 Franklin Gardens
Hitchin (01462 459821)
simonwalker69@yahoo.co.uk

Registered Charity No. 280746



The Triangle, Hitchin, at the junction of Bridge Street, Queen Street, and Park Street, from a contemporary postcard. It's hard to date some of these images, and this one is no exception. Perhaps somewhere between 1900 and 1929.