



Hitchin Historical Society

Registered Charity No. 280746

Newsletter

Issue number 43 - July 2014

Scilla Honoured!



Scilla Douglas, our President

Congratulations to our esteemed President Scilla Douglas, who has been presented with the *Personal Achievement Award* by the Hertfordshire Association for Local History (HALH).

Scilla has worked tirelessly for our Society for the last thirty seven years - from shortly after its inception, in fact - and taken part in every aspect of it, from publications, preservation and plaques to chair and now President. She is also a member of just about every other organisation in the town, always keeping an eye open for neglected historical artefacts, interesting overlooked items and old buildings in need of some tlc. Who else would have spotted an ancient horse trough lying in an overgrown garden, now - with the owner's consent - a flower trough in Market Square? Or notice, at a car boot sale in Bedfordshire, two 19th century iron brackets manufactured in Hitchin? They now support a seat in Market Square.

A well-deserved honour. We're proud of you, Scilla.

On another note, we are still looking for a Newsletter Editor. Fancy a go at it? Let us know! And please don't forget to complete the short emailed questionnaire about use of the website. All comments very welcome.

Remembered with Pride

Saturday 28 June, was a special day for the Society Publications Team. It saw the coming to fruition of a different venture for us, a joint production with the British Schools Museum of a book commemorating their past pupils who gave their lives in the Great War.

It was a day to remember, in addition, as we became part of the wider museum celebration when they opened their new exhibition, *A School at War*, and unveiled a memorial board.



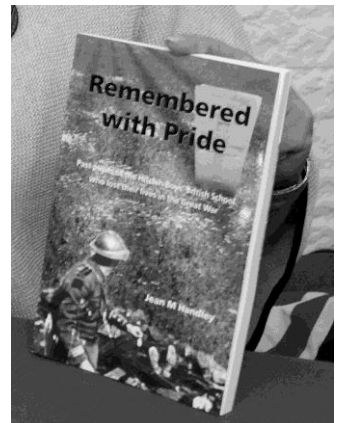
Jean Handley

Author Jean Handley's meticulous research, uncovering the stories of the 68 young men who died, provides a fascinating read. It is backed up with copious illustrative material (much in colour), maps and general background information. It provides a snapshot of Hitchin as well as the war.



Publications team Scilla and Pauline with the author

Copies of *Remembered with Pride* (£12.95) are available from the Society, Hitchin British Schools Museum shop, Eric T Moore's, *Bookbug*, and other outlets.



Pauline Humphries



Notice of Extraordinary General Meeting of the Hitchin Historical Society 8pm, Thursday 25 September 2014, at Church House, Churchyard, Hitchin

Dear Member,

At our last Annual General Meeting in March, we elected two committee members for the three vacancies then available. We have now received a nomination for the third vacancy, and therefore an election for that vacancy will take place at an EGM of the Society at our meeting on 25 September. The process should take no more than a couple of minutes. Any additional applications for this vacancy should be made known to me no later than Thursday 18 September, with signatures of the applicant, a proposer and seconder.

Leslie Mustoe
Secretary, Hitchin Historical Society

July 2014

Town Hall and Museum News

Many of you will have read reports in the local press recently, highlighting issues concerning the work being carried out by North Herts District Council at the Town Hall in Brand Street, which will also house the new museum. Examples include a wall across the stage, possible damage to the sprung dance floor, installation of exposed pipework and trunking in the entrance foyer and Mountford Hall, and damage to the floor in the Lucas Room. HHS has been involved, with other community group and Hitchin Town Hall Ltd, in challenging any activity that we feel might compromise the historic architectural features and fabric of the building, as well as working towards the provision of a first-class museum for North Herts. In doing this, we have been in contact not only with NHDC but also English Heritage and NHDC's architects. Relationships are not always easy, but we continue to work in the best interests of the local community and the preservation of the town's unique character. More information will appear on the Society's website.



Phil Rowe

Maydencroft Manor Society Visit

Awet June evening found intrepid visitors enjoying the accustomed generous hospitality of Bob and Franie Williams in their beautiful medieval manor house. Bob's encyclopaedic knowledge of the buildings' history, the atmospheric barn, charming gardens and Franie's scrumptious baking resulted in a delightful experience, despite the rain.



Have you been on a recent visit? Want to share the experience? Have you taken some pictures? Perhaps you could write a short piece for the Newsletter! All you have to do is send your pictures and some words to newsletter@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk, and you'll have your chance to get into print.

Hitchin Town Action Group (HTAG)

HHS is, along with Hitchin Forum, Hitchin Society and Hitchin Initiative, a member of HTAG. Some of our members participated in an HTAG event last year, upstairs at The Sun, when we explored various aspects of Hitchin life, and asked for ideas - which filled many yellow post-it notes by the end of the evening!

Since then, HTAG has been busy on the town's behalf on various issues, including street surveys and highlighting areas of concern with NHDC. The latter includes NHDC's *South of Hitchin* development proposals at Priory Fields, between Parkway and Maydencroft Lane, which would add 6,000 to 7,400 new houses to the town.

Holy Saviour Church – the first 150 years

Holy Saviour Church in Radcliffe Road will be 150 years old on Ascension Day (Thursday 14 May) 2015. Celebrations will start on Advent Sunday 2014 and culminate in a service of thanksgiving at the end of 2015. A variety of activities have been planned to provide fun and friendship, and to raise funds for the church. Carpet kneelers at the High Altar will be replaced with new kneelers incorporating the pattern in the tiling in the church. The residents of the Triangle area are being encouraged to participate, and events so far planned include:

- A variety of visiting speakers on Sundays
- Advent Service and Christmas Tree Festival 2014
- A 'Bring & Sing' in April 2015
- A special Ascension service on Sunday 17 June 2015, with the Bishop of St Albans
- A summer Garden Party in 2015
- A Grand Ball at the newly-refurbished Town Hall in October 2015
- Christmas Tree Festival 2015 and Candlelit Carol Service to close the year of celebration



*Holy Saviour Church,
Radcliffe Road*

Murder Mystery - Can You Help?

The Murder of Elizabeth Ridgely - Hitchin, 1919

On 27 January 1919, Elizabeth Ridgely was found dead in her shop at 125 Nightingale Road, Hitchin. Despite significant head injuries, blood found in many parts of the premises and her dog lying dead beside her with similar head injuries, the local police decided that she had died as a result of an accident. The Chief Constable, not being happy with this conclusion, asked for the assistance of Scotland Yard, and within a few weeks, John Healy had been arrested and later charged with her murder. In June, Healy appeared at the Summer Assizes and was acquitted.

I am keen to further explore this extraordinary case, having come into possession of material believed not previously released into the public domain. In particular, descendants of the police officers involved in the case may prove helpful in 'handed-down' stories and possibly any photographs of the officers themselves (unfortunately, Hertfordshire Local Archives does not have any records of the relevant police officers). A number of officers were involved, but the two central characters were Superintendent Reed and Police Constable 109 Kirby.

Other places of interest are Goldsmith's veterinary practice and George Kirby undertakers - where were they in 1919?

Something that was never resolved at the time of the incident was the discovery of Healy's ration book which was handed in at the local Food Control Office. Healy had lost it around the time of the murder and it had been found by some children and handed in. The children were never traced and therefore where it was found remains a mystery. The rumour at the time was that the parents of the children didn't want to get involved and therefore the police didn't get the opportunity to speak to them. Are there any descendants around who may also have 'handed-down' stories?

More research needs to be carried out in the Archives but if anyone has any suggestions or ideas about this case, I would be very pleased to hear from you.

Paul Stickler paulstickler@aol.com Tel: 07880 33361

Society Library Arrangements

For the benefit of new members, and as a reminder to existing members, most of the library is on display at every meeting except the AGM and the Christmas event. A choice is made each time of the books to go on display, but the printed catalogue is available and we can get out anything else required. Only members may borrow books and ideally books should be returned at the next meeting, but this is not absolutely necessary. The catalogue can also be consulted on the website, and it would be helpful if members could contact me in advance if there is a particular item they would like to borrow at the next meeting.



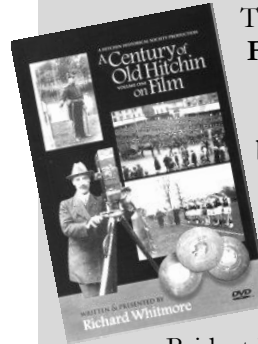
The books are arranged in alphabetical order of author (or title where there are multiple authors) within each of 3 categories: Hitchin; Hertfordshire; and General Local History. You will notice that some items are marked "ref. only" on the catalogue; these are not kept at Church House but in safe keeping because of their rarity or age. Please contact me if you require one of these.

If anyone has comments or suggestions about the library or suggestions for purchases (within the remit of the Society), please contact me by email:

librarian@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk

Audrey Stewart

Hitchin Festival events



The **Old Hitchin on Film** evenings at the Queen Mother Theatre are fully booked, but check at the Festival Box Office, as there may be an extra performance.

Bridget Howlett leads a **Priory Park Walk** on Sunday 13 July.

The **Miss Lewis Memorial Lecture** - "*Why poisonous plants make good medicines*" - is at the Queen Mother Theatre Studio at 8pm on Wednesday 16 July.

The **Physic Garden** "meet the experts" afternoon is on Sunday 20 July.

Audrey Stewart leads a **Triangle History Walk** also on 20 July.

See the Festival programme for more details.

Booking required for all events except the Physic Garden Afternoon.

More Dates for your Diary

Saturday 27 September

You'll be able to buy your 2015 Hitchin **Calendar** from the Hitchin Initiative stall on Hitchin Market. HHS has sponsored one of the pages.

Saturday 25 October

10am to 2pm at the Pitcher and Piano, Market Place. Launch of **Phil Howard's** latest book, ***Fire! Fire!*** which is based on an unofficial Hitchin Fire Station diary kept between 1926 and 1929. Diary entries, press-cuttings, photographs and commentary abound to make this a fascinating view behind the scenes at a time of transition for the fire service.

Saturday 11 July 2015

If you already have next year's diary, please mark the date of yet another HHS Book Launch. **The Physic Garden** volunteers are working on a book dedicated to the plants in the Garden and their medicinal and culinary uses.

More information nearer the time.



The Newsletter is published twice yearly by **Hitchin Historical Society**, a registered charity dedicated to informing the public of the history of Hitchin and district, and undertaking research into the origins and development of buildings, organisations, crafts, trades and other aspects of historical interest, and to publish the results of such research.

PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS 2014

At Church House, Churchyard, Hitchin at 8 pm on Thursdays, followed by light refreshments

- SEPTEMBER 25th **CARRIAGES TO CARS: Ralph E Sanders & Sons of Hitchin**
An illustrated talk by Stephen Bradford-Best, following publication in March of his book of the same name.
- OCTOBER 23rd **TREADMILLS & TRANSPORTATION: life inside Hertford Gaol in the 1830s & 1840s.**
An illustrated talk by Eileen Wallace
- NOVEMBER 27th **THE BEST OF OLD HITCHIN ON FILM.**
Compiled and presented by Richard Whitmore, Sam Hallas and Tim Ray; some new discoveries and a few old favourites.
- DECEMBER 5th **CHRISTMAS EVENT.**
Be entertained, enjoy some light seasonal refreshments and socialise with fellow members.

Hitchin Historical Society Newsletter by email?

If you would like to receive your Newsletter by email in future, in pdf format, then please let us know. You will receive it a little earlier than the traditional method, and some pictures will be in glorious colour! All you have to do is send an email to: newsletter@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk.

A FOND FAREWELL

Our thanks as ever go to Messrs **John Shilcock** in Bancroft for providing us with commodious accommodation for our 'overflow' publications stock.

We are both saddened and delighted that **Heather Tisdale and Thomas Pitchford** will no longer be providing us with refreshments at member meetings. Saddened because we will miss their ever-cheerful efficiency and splendid tea, but delighted because Thomas has landed an archivist job at the University of Wales in Lampeter!

Those who enjoyed the recent visit to Hitchin Boys' School library will have appreciated Thomas' skills and enthusiasm for his work, so will not be surprised. We wish them both well for the future, and send heartfelt good wishes as they take up their new posts.

Erm, any volunteers *dare* to step into their shoes...?



Thomas serves the tea

HHS Committee and Contacts

President..... Priscilla Douglas	Film Archive.....Richard Whitmore
Chairman..... Phil Rowe	Physic Garden.....Dr Gerry Tidy
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Journal..... Simon Walker	Publications (sales) and Distribution.... Vicki Lockyer
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Membership Peter Moss membership@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk	

If you have an item you'd like to submit to the HHS Newsletter or information for any contributor, please email newsletter@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk, or contact any committee member.

HHS website: www.hitchinhistoricals.org.uk