



**Hitchin
Historical
Society**

Registered Charity No. 280746

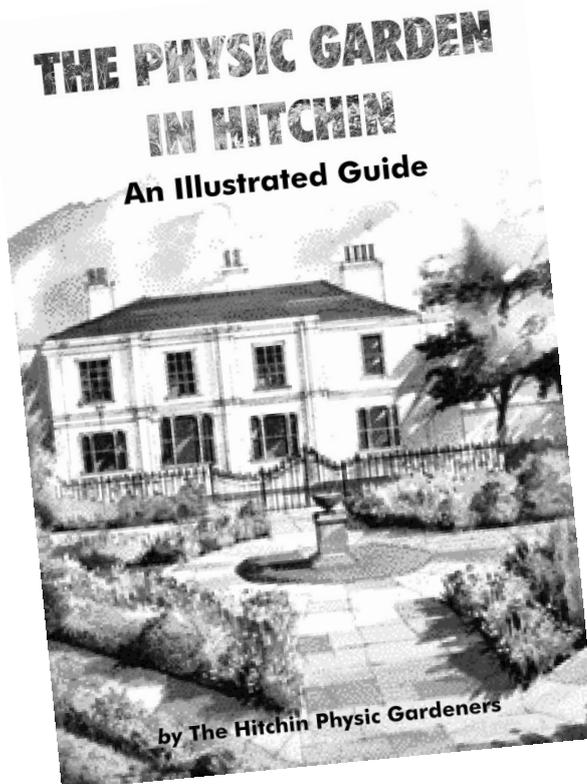
Newsletter

Issue number 45 - July 2015

The Physic Garden

Hitchin Historical Society is celebrating the William Ransom Physic Garden's Silver Jubilee by publishing *The Physic Garden in Hitchin: an Illustrated Guide*. The Grand Launch is on Saturday 18th July from 10am to 2pm outside the old Museum, Charnwood House, Paynes Park, Hitchin. Authors will be there signing books, and the Physic Garden will be open and volunteers available to give special guided tours. The book will be on sale at the launch, price £12.95. After the event you will be able to buy a copy from the Society, from E.T. Moore's bookshop in Hitchin and David's Bookshop in Letchworth.

A physic garden was traditionally used to teach apothecaries (the forerunners of present-day pharmacists) about medicinal herbs. Hitchin and its surroundings have a long history of producing drugs from plants. Edward Perks, a chemist and druggist in the High Street, was growing lavender by 1823, followed by William Ransom cultivating and producing drugs from plants (including from deadly nightshade and hemlock) from 1846 onwards.



The genesis of Hitchin's physic garden came when Miss Vi Lewis, the last pharmacist at Perks & Llewellyn (as the chemist shop had become), donated her shop fittings and pharmacy collection to the Hertfordshire Medical and Pharmaceutical Museum Trust, which was formed to find a home for the collection and to found a Physic Garden. Thus, the William Ransom Physic Garden became a reality, opening on May 20th 1990. Until its closure in 2012, Hitchin Museum displayed the shop fittings and many artefacts in a dedicated room. A few years ago, the Hertfordshire Medical and Pharmaceutical Trust merged with our Society, so we now have responsibility for the collection and physic garden, the latter cared for by a group of dedicated volunteers under the head gardener, Jennifer Dee.

The garden contains almost a hundred species of plant, some well known, such as primrose, rue, and hyssop, and others less common, such as fleabane, lungwort, and black snakeroot. The centrepiece of the garden is a bronze pestle-and-mortar sundial on a stone pedestal. The gates, railings and two benches in the garden were made by Henry Isaac, iron founder in St Ippolyts.

The guidebook is written by Physic Garden volunteers to celebrate the 25 years since the garden opened. It describes the history of the garden, with chapters about William Ransom & Son and Perks & Llewellyn. The plants in the Garden are described, with details of their uses and other interesting facts.



Notice of Extraordinary General Meeting of the Hitchin Historical Society 8pm, Thursday 24 September 2015, at Church House, Churchyard, Hitchin

Dear Member,

Notice is hereby given of an **Extraordinary General Meeting** of Hitchin Historical Society to be held at Church House, Churchyard, Hitchin on **Thursday 24 September 2015 at 8pm**. There is one item on the agenda: the Election of Chairman. The normal monthly members' meeting will follow immediately after the election, which should not take very long.

The Society has been without a Chairman since the AGM in March. Nominations are invited for the position.

- You must have the nominee's agreement before submitting a nomination;
- Nominees, and those proposing and seconding, must be current members of the Society.

Nominations must be in the hands of the Secretary by 17 September 2015 *at the latest*.

Leslie Mustoe
Secretary, Hitchin Historical Society

June 2015

Visits in View

June is a convenient place to take stock of the Society's 2015 visits; almost 130 members have attended the seven events held so far. Janet Walker's '*Historic Walsworth*' in March took us around part of the town often overlooked by local historians. Yet it is a fascinating area and Janet clearly highlighted how the village has changed; it was also a timely walk given the recent fire at the *Sailor Boy* and the uncertain future of the former Walsworth School, now a much valued community centre.

In April and May it was fitting we drew on Audrey Stewart's detailed knowledge of Hitchin's '*Victorian Triangle*', and of Holy Saviour in its 150th Anniversary Year. In the visit to the church, Audrey was ably supported by member Jean Boothby, the Revd Ian Todd and a team of helpers; it was good to learn more of the Gainsfords and to see the progress on the restoration of the nearby Almshouses.

The April London visit to the Emery Walker House and William Morris Society was something a bit out of the ordinary. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, we had links to the Arts and Crafts movement through the Hitchin Society of Arts and Letters and the involvement of the author Wentworth Huyshe and artist and engraver F.L. Griggs.

Early June saw three visits. First, another chance to visit Maydencroft which must be one of Hitchin's most interesting and attractive larger houses. Bob and Franie Williams have kindly hosted Society attendance for many years; this time we managed a truly balmy evening to explore the gardens and immediate surroundings of the house. Second, a visit to Chicksands Priory. The Society has been before but not for many years. It was good, therefore, to revisit the history of this fascinating house and to see that more of the kitchen gardens are being taken in hand by the Friends. Third was Terry Knight's evening walk on '*Hitchin's Historic Centre*'. It is always good to explore with Terry, as even the familiar is given a new slant, and unexpected details emerge of buildings that you pass every day.

I hope members have enjoyed these outings. I am always keen to hear suggestions for visits, both local and further afield.

David Howlett, Programme Secretary

History Day!

Saturday 11 July, 10am to 4pm, is our first **History Day**, as part of the Hitchin Festival. Participants will include British Schools Museum, International Garden Cities Exhibition, Herts Archives & Local Studies, the Museum Service of North Herts District Council, Hitchin Forum, Hitchin Society, North Herts Archaeological Society, Pirton Local History Group, Charlton Village, Royston and District Local History Society and the Three Counties Asylum Group.

We hope you will be able to come along to help make this occasion a special one! It's free, refreshments will be available, and just about everyone who knows anything about Hitchin's history is likely to be there. As a bonus, St Mary's Church Tower tours will be available at £2 from 10:30am on. What an opportunity!

Images from this year

Holy Saviour Church, Hitchin - visit 31st May



Emery Walker House, Hammersmith Terrace, London
- outing 29th April



26th May manning our stall at Hitchin library's 50th birthday celebrations,
David and Pauline welcomed two new members to the society!



Dates for your diary

HHS has sponsored a number of events in this year's Hitchin Festival. Details and tickets from the Festival Box Office, Hitchin Initiative, 27 Churchyard:

Sunday 12 July at 2pm - Priory Park walk with Bridget Howlett. (£5)

Tuesday 14 July, 8pm, and Wednesday 15 July, 6pm - Old Hitchin on Film, Richard Whitmore Studio, Queen Mother Theatre. Including Hertfordshire in WW2, and a church minister's excellent colour photographs of Hitchin, recently-discovered after forty years. (£6)

Sunday 19 July, 2pm - Hitchin's Blue Plaques –a guided walk with Pauline Humphries. (£5)

Wednesday 22 July, 8pm - Safeguarding medicinal plants: the work of botanical gardens. The Miss Lewis Memorial Lecture, given by Sara Oldfield, former Secretary-General of Botanic Gardens Conservation International, Richard Whitmore Studio, Queen Mother Theatre. (£6)

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

HHS Committee & Contacts

President	Priscilla Douglas	Film Archive	Richard Whitmore
Chairman	<i>Vacancy</i>	Librarian	Audrey Stewart <i>librarian@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk</i>
Secretary	Leslie Mustoe	Publications (sales) & Distribution	Vicki Lockyer
Treasurer	John Skeeles	Newsletter	<i>Vacancy</i> <i>newsletter@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk</i>
Programme	David Howlett*	Website editor	Zena Grant ** <i>admin@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk</i>
Journal	Simon Walker*	Without Portfolio	Maureen Sellers
Publications	Phil Rowe **		
Membership	Peter Moss <i>membership@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk</i>		
Physic Garden	Dr Gerry Tidy		

(*co-opted committee members ** non-committee contacts)

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



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 2015

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

- SEPTEMBER 24th **THE WILLIAM RANSOM PHYSIC GARDEN** – an illustrated talk by the Physic Gardeners about the new Guide Book .
- OCTOBER 22nd **150 YEARS OF SENIOR FOOTBALL IN HITCHIN** – an illustrated talk by Neil Jensen
- NOVEMBER 26th **MORE OLD HITCHIN ON FILM** – compiled and presented by Richard Whitmore, Sam Hallas and Tim Ray

SPECIAL EVENTS 2015 [* a charge is payable for these]

- WEDNESDAY *** THE MISS LEWIS LECTURE**
22nd JULY
at 8:00pm
At the Richard Whitmore Studio, Queen Mother Theatre. Details in the Hitchin Festival Programme
- FRIDAY 4th *** CHRISTMAS EVENT** At Church House. Be entertained, enjoy some light seasonal refreshments and socialise with fellow members; This is an all-ticket event, to include a “Know your Hitchin” quiz by Alan Fleck. More details will be provided with the Journal mailing in October
- DECEMBER
at 7:30 pm

VISITS 2015

*Once you have renewed your membership you will receive a booking form which **MUST** be completed and returned to the Programme Secretary in advance as numbers are often limited. Starting times and venues vary, and for some visits [marked *] there is a charge.*

AUGUST Sunday 2 nd at 2.30 pm	* ASHWELL'S HISTORY - A guided walk by David Short [Limit: 20 members]
SEPTEMBER Sunday 6 th at 2pm	HITCHIN : AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WALK - Conducted by Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews, Archaeology Officer. [Limit: 20 members]
SEPTEMBER Sunday 27 th at 2pm	HITCHIN PRIORY AND THE DELMÉ-RADCLIFFES -A guided visit by Liz Hunter and Bridget Howlett . [Limit: 20 members]

Didn't You Used to Be ?

Although to us in Hitchin Historical Society Richard Whitmore is, first and foremost, our highly-valued film archivist, to the rest of the country he is the newsreader with one of the best-known faces on television during the 1970s and '80s. Richard surprised many people when he gave up his BBC job to fulfil a long-held ambition to become a professional actor.

In an honest and occasionally self-deprecating autobiography celebrating his 80th birthday, he recalls his years as a young blade in Hitchin, where he worked as a reporter on the Hertfordshire Express and 'trod the boards' with The Bancroft Players amateur dramatic society, later heading their successful campaign to build the town's Queen Mother Theatre.

It was while working as a freelance journalist in the 1960s that Richard found himself a niche in broadcasting, first on radio and then with BBC Television, where he was appointed a staff reporter. After ten years on the road covering major news stories of the day, he became one of the regular anchor men on what was then the BBC's Nine O'clock News. Richard writes with honesty about the perks and problems of becoming 'a famous face' and how a sudden fear of flying affected his career. He also explains why, in his mid-fifties, disenchantment with news reading led him to give up the security of his BBC staff job to try earning a living in the unpredictable world of theatre.

Richard and his wife Wendy were married in 1957; they have four daughters and nine grandchildren and still live in the market town where they were both born. *Didn't you used to be ... Richard Whitmore?* is now on sale at Eric T Moore Books, 24 Bridge Street, Hitchin, and at the Hitchin Town Centre Initiative shop in Churchyard.



Didn't you used to be ...
RICHARD WHITMORE?
Hitchin writer, broadcaster and actor publishes his autobiography

