



From the Chairman

Ninety years ago saw the publication of the first volume of The History of Hitchin written by Reginald Hine. So I thought it might be of interest to give details of its contents for those members who do not own a copy.

The first chapter is devoted to The Manor, followed by chapters covering such diverse subjects as The Church, The Priory, The Biggin, the Civil War and Commonwealth, The Churchwardens, The Poor and The Highways and Byways. It ends with a Bibliography of a list of Subscribers. The book also contains 40 illustrations.

The second volume appeared two years later. The first chapter is on Minsden Chapel, where Hine's ashes were scattered after his death in 1949. This chapter is followed by chapters on diverse subjects, the Baptists, the Congregationalists, the Quakers, Sports and Pastimes,

Crime and Punishment, Wills and Testaments, Place-names, Field-names and Surnames, and The Fire Brigade. The volume ends with a Hitchin chronology and five appendices, List of Vicars, List of those who fell in The Great War, Addenda and Corrigenda, Volume one, Bibliography, Supplementary List of Subscribers and an Index. There are 120 illustrations.

The two volumes were reprinted in 1972 by Eric Moore, who kept a second hand bookshop in Bridge Street for many years.

Since then many books have been published on various aspects of Hitchin. A large number have been written by our members and work is progressing satisfactorily with 'Discovering Hitchin 2', which is due to appear next year.

Terry Knight

From the newsletter editor – David Dingwall

Welcome to the summer edition of the Hitchin Historical Society newsletter. I hope you have enjoyed the recent series of meetings and visits that have taken place so far this year in what is of course our 40th anniversary year. There has been a lot of activity taking place so far in 2017 which you can read all about here!

At the Society AGM in March, we were pleased to elect Bob Williams as Society President and Debbie Burstow as Society Librarian. All other committee members were re-elected. After the business of the meeting, members were able to celebrate the 40th anniversary milestone with the special anniversary cake! More about that on page 4 of the newsletter.

I am sorry to inform members of the recent passing of Robin Aikman who was my predecessor as newsletter editor. I am grateful to Chris Honey who has provided a very fitting tribute to Robin.

This edition of the newsletter has been produced a little earlier than usual due to the fact I'm on holiday later in June. This does however, present one advantage in that we can advertise the Hitchin Historical Society contributions to the Hitchin Festival 2017.

I hope this newsletter finds you well and that you continue to enjoy the remainder of this year's activities.

The Reginald Hine Award 2017

Congratulations to Pauline Humphries who is the 2017 recipient of the Reginald Hine Award, pictured here receiving the cup and certificate from our President, Bob Williams at the Society meeting on 25 May 2017. Pauline has been personally involved in many Society publications over more than twenty years, and is currently engaged on 'Discovering Hitchin 2' which you can read more about on page 2 of this newsletter. A 'joint' recipient of the Hine Award on previous occasions, this time Pauline has the cup all to herself for a year, thanks to her many years of tireless work as the Society's Publications Secretary.



Photo courtesy of Simon Walker.

Obituary: Robin Aikman

What a fascinating coffin adorned with WW2 Spitfires; what's this all about? Well I soon found out at his life celebration. Robin gained a degree in Aeronautical Engineering and then became a flying officer in the RAF followed by work on the Fairy Delta 2 as an aerodynamicist. That was only part of his versatile and creative life; his enquiring mind was always curious about the world about him and how things worked. He was passionate about the British countryside, walking, vintage cars like his 1932 Lagonda, the cryptic crossword, history, Scotland, bagpipe music, his family and wine.



As early as 1960 he was involved in computing, becoming a Managing Director, and then running his own IT consultancy for 20 years. He was, with wife Maureen, the owner and manager of an English vineyard in Norfolk, also for 20 years, and had an English wine shop in London.

In retirement Robin's interests encompassed calligraphy, genealogy, old watches and cars. He flew airplanes at Panshanger and became a member of the Hitchin Historical Society. Well what a life, and I only came to know him as the editor of the Newsletter!

Article by Chris Honey. Photo by permission of the Aikman family.

Discovering Hitchin 2 – Information needed!

Unlike the rather faltering progress with the HS2 project, your Society's route to completion on "Discovering 2" (sequel to our 1995 "Discovering Hitchin") is running to plan. The team (made up of both "old" and "new" faces) is working hard towards a launch in October 2018, a date which would have coincided with our late President Scilla Douglas's 80th birthday. We meet regularly to discuss progress at "The Sun" (just like our Parliamentary forebears, only with less Ale).

We do have some information gaps to fill, despite trips to Hertfordshire Archives. There may well be relevant documents in our new Museum, but we have no research access at present. We are particularly interested in the small, mainly early 19th century, group of houses now known as the "Hitchin Hill Conservation Area". This comprises a secluded area in Hitchin Hill Path and Butcher's Lane, bounded by Stevenage Road and London Road. Many of them appear on the Bailey Denton Map of the town in 1844, where they form a distinct settlement, hence an early description as "Hitchin New Town".

Do you live there, or know anybody who does? In the "old days" Scilla and I would have gone "cold-calling", but times have changed and unknown visitors tend to be viewed with suspicion. We would love to hear about House Deeds, or about anything that makes your property special.

If you can help in any way, we would love to hear from you. Bridget Howlett.

Pauline Humphries

Hitchin Historical Society Library – from Maureen Sellers

Just a reminder that the Society library will be available again at the September 28th meeting. Any books which are currently out on loan can be returned then.



Hitchin Bank note goes under the hammer

It is not every day that a piece of Hitchin history comes on the open market but at a recent auction in May 2017, Spink & Son auction house (London) sold a Hitchin Bank note for £1500. The note was issued by Hitchin Bank on 14 April 1887 with serial number 21039 and was worth £10, a not inconsiderable sum of money in 1887. At the time, Hitchin Bank was owned by three Quakers; James Hack Tuke, Francis Lucas and Frederic Seeböhm. If you look at the photo, a small triangular cut has been made in the bottom right hand corner where Mr. Seeböhm's

signature can still be made out. Whilst you wouldn't be able to use this note today, it is proof that there are collectors out there looking to purchase artefacts from Britain's banking history.

Photo taken from www.the-saleroom.com for Spink & Son auction.

New website for Hitchin Historical Society

Further to an update in the last newsletter, the Society is pleased to report that the new website for HHS is up and running. A lot of hard work has taken place behind the scenes courtesy of our Website editor, Zena Grant, to build a website which is more up to date with current technology and to expand on the previous website to include information on news and events, publications and a page on The Physic Garden. The Society also hopes it can generate more publicity through its online presence. Our thanks go to Zena for producing and maintaining the new website. Please do take a look if you can; the web address is www.hitchinhistoricals.org.uk

Robert Adam architectural drawings

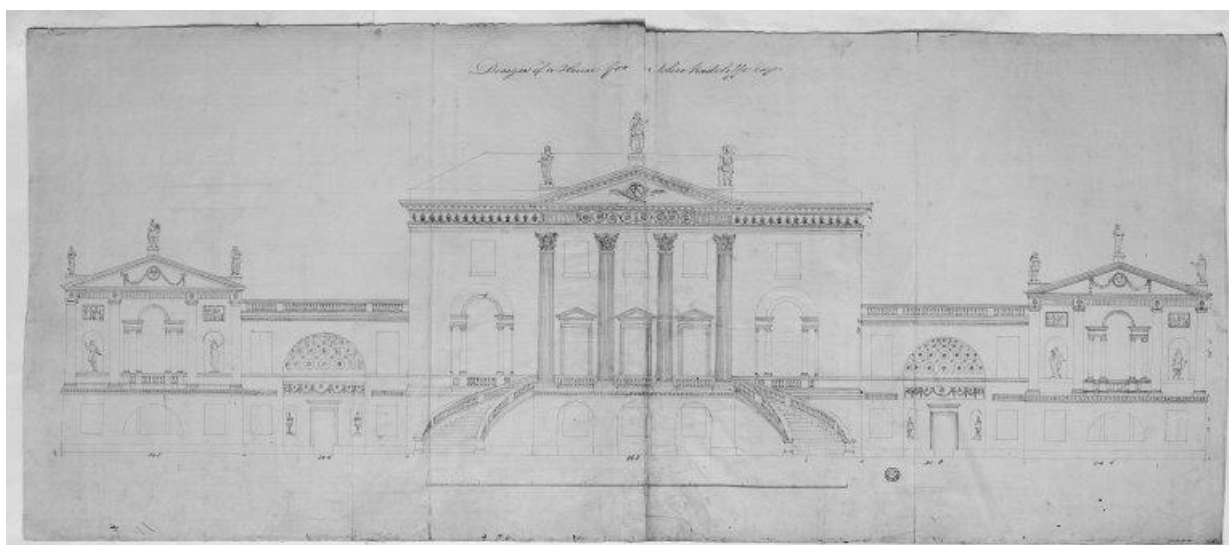
About 15 Society members visited the recently reopened Sir John Soane's museum in Lincoln's Inn Fields, London to see the vast display of antiquities, paintings and objects collected and displayed in what was the home of architect and member of High Society in late 18th/early 19th centuries, Sir John Soane.

After visiting the house, members were treated to an added bonus when we entered the building next door that houses the museum archives. This includes a very important collection of some 9,000 Robert Adam architectural drawings out of a total of 30,000 architectural drawings. The collection holds 82% of all Adam architectural drawings known to survive.

We were met by Dr. Frances Sands who is Curator of Drawings and Books for the museum and is an expert on Adam drawings. The Society was given privileged viewing of Adam drawings for two designs with a Hitchin connection; these being for Hitchin Priory and Highdown at Pirton.

The drawings were commissioned by the owner of the two properties, John Radcliffe, in the early 1770s. Had both schemes gone ahead, these would have utterly transformed the buildings with grand symmetrical neo-classical facades, typical of the period. Whilst the exact reasons why these schemes never went ahead are unclear, it is known that John Radcliffe was notorious for spending his money, and it is likely that his bid to become MP for St. Albans shortly after the drawings were commissioned drained his financial resources. So the plans remain confined to paper to this day, though he did build the present south front of the Priory apparently without the assistance of an architect. The viewing of the drawings generated a lot of interest and questions from members.

The collections are available to search online at www.soane.org/collections. Our grateful thanks go to Dr Frances Sands and staff at Sir John Soane's museum for allowing our group to view these precious architectural drawings.



Robert Adam drawing for Highdown House, Pirton showing proposed façade. Image Reference: SM Adam Volume 29/42. By courtesy of the Trustees of Sir John Soane's museum.

HHS Quiz 2017 Answers

As promised in the last edition of the newsletter, here are the answers to the HHS Quiz which was kindly prepared for us by Leslie Mustoe. Well done to all members who took part!

1. Bancroft, 2. Offa, 3. Lister, 4. The Angel Inn, 5. The Biggin, 6. Bunyan Road, 7. The Lairage, 8. Benslow, 9. Tilehouse Street, 10. Old Hale Way, 11. St. Mary's Church, 12. Marketplace, 13. Girton College, 14. Lavender, 15. York Road, 16. Butts Close, 17. Woodside, 18. Dacre, 19. Portmill Lane, 20. Baliol

Hitchin Historical Society 2017 AGM

The Society AGM did of course have a special significance in 2017 as this is the 40th anniversary year of the Society; a milestone HHS most certainly wanted to celebrate! Members will receive a copy of the minutes for the business of the 2017 AGM in early 2018.

Following the conclusion of AGM business, it was time to celebrate the 40th anniversary of HHS with the cutting of the special anniversary cake, which had been made by Jennine Hegley. The ceremonial cutting of the cake was undertaken by Jean Williams, one of the founder members of the Society (below left). All those members attending the AGM were then invited to participate in the eating of the cake, but not before the customary photographs to mark the occasion had been taken! (below right). *Both photos courtesy of Simon Walker.*



Meetings and Visits January – June 2017

It is hard to believe that we are almost half way through 2017 now but here is a round-up of the Society meetings and visits that have taken place during the first half of the year.

In January, Dan Hill, Great War Historian and founding member of the Herts at War project, gave a talk on 'The Hertfordshire Regiment in 1917'. February saw Stevenage-based local historian, Hugh Madgin, give an illustrated talk on 'Stevenage's History'. In April, Stephen Copson of the Baptist Historical Society gave a talk on 'Hitchin Nonconformity in the 17th and 18th centuries'. The last meeting before the summer break in May saw Andy Gibbs, Audience Development Manager at the British Schools Museum, give a talk on 'Bringing Dead Street to Life'.

A number of visits have also taken place which included two visits to London. The first on April 10th was to the Friends House Library and Archive for the purposes of exploring Hitchin's Quaker History. The second was on April 25th, with a group visit to Sir John Soane's museum and archives (see page 3 of this newsletter). On April 30th Bridget and David Howlett led a walk titled 'Purwell Perambulation – An Historical Exploration'.

Other opportunities to view local archives were on a visit on March 8th to Barclays Bank in Hitchin (whose predecessor issued the 1887 bank note recently sold at auction) and a two-part session on Hitchin House History which included a visit to Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies. There was also another opportunity on June 7th for members to visit Maydencroft Manor by kind permission of Bob and Frances Williams. As we go to press, there will be two visits to Hitchin Girls' School (June 21st) and Little Benslow Hills house and gardens (June 25th). Reports on these visits in the next newsletter.



Left: Members viewing the archives at The Friends House Library and Archive in London (photo: Bridget Howlett).
Right: Members outside Purwell Mill on the 'Purwell Perambulation' walk (photo: David Dingwall)

Hitchin Festival 2017– Hitchin Historical Society events

The Hitchin Festival takes place this year from 1st - 31st July. HHS will be hosting a number of events during the Festival. Here are some further details below; we hope you will be interested in attending some of these events.

Apart from Local History Day on July 1st and the Physic Garden Open Day on July 15th, **BOOKING IS REQUIRED FOR ALL EVENTS.** This should be done via the Festival Box Office, hosted by Hitchin Initiative at its new premises opposite the War Memorial at 1A Churchyard, Hitchin, SG5 1HR. Alternatively call 01462 453335.

Local History Day – Saturday July 1st No booking required.

10am-4pm, Church House, Churchyard, Hitchin. Admission free.

Participants include: Hitchin Historical Society, William Ransom Physic Garden, Hertfordshire Constabulary Historical Society, Hitchin Forum, Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (HALS), British Schools Museum, First Garden City International Exhibition, North Herts Archaeological Society, North Herts District Council Museum Service, Holy Saviour Church (Hitchin) and Ickleford Arts and Crafts Industries.

Hitchin Railway History Walk – Sunday July 2nd. BOOKING ESSENTIAL.

Start 9.30am. Admission £5.00. Led by David Howlett.

Priory Park Walk – Sunday July 9th. BOOKING ESSENTIAL.

Start 2pm. Admission £5.00. Led by Bridget Howlett.

Old Hitchin on Film – Tuesday July 11th. BOOKING ESSENTIAL.

Start 8pm, The Richard Whitmore Studio, Queen Mother Theatre. Admission £6.00. Presented by Richard Whitmore.

The Annual Miss Lewis Lecture – Wednesday July 12th. BOOKING ESSENTIAL.

Start 8pm, The Richard Whitmore Studio, Queen Mother Theatre. Admission £5.00

The title of the lecture is: ‘**Tabloids, triumphs and tragedies: drugs in modern medicine**’. The guest speaker is Professor Tilli Tansey OBE, Professor of the History of Modern Medical Sciences at Queen Mary London University. Professor Tansey is a well-known writer and has frequently written or contributed to programmes and articles about modern medicine.

William Ransom Physic Garden Open Day – Saturday July 15th. No booking required.

11am – 3pm, Paynes Park. Admission free. Volunteers will be on hand to talk about the Physic Garden.

Hitchin’s Blue Plaques Walk – Sunday July 16th. BOOKING ESSENTIAL.

Start 2pm. Admission £5.00. Led by Pauline Humphries and David Howlett.

The Scilla Douglas Lecture – Wednesday July 19th. BOOKING ESSENTIAL.

Start 8pm, The Richard Whitmore Studio, Queen Mother Theatre, Admission £5.00.

The lecture’s title is: ‘**A Lost Elysium? The impact of motoring on the English landscape in the inter-war years**’. The guest speaker is John Minnis, until recently Senior Investigator with Historic England and co-author of *Carscapes: the Motor Car, Architecture and Landscape in England* (2012).

Full details are in this year’s Hitchin Festival programme but please note that the correct venue for the Miss Lewis Lecture and the Scilla Douglas Lecture is the Richard Whitmore Studio, **NOT** Church House as stated in the Festival Programme.

Also, don’t forget to look out for the 2017 Hitchin History Play from Kirk Foster at the Market Theatre in Sun Street. This year’s production features Sir Henry Wood, of BBC Promenade Concerts fame, whose funeral was held at St Mary’s in 1944 and which the Society helped commemorate not long ago with a concert and plaque unveiling. The play runs on selected dates from Thursday July 13th to Saturday July 29th 2017 with all performances commencing at 7.30 pm.



HITCHIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY – PROGRAMME 2017

Meetings – Held at Church House, Churchyard, Hitchin on Thursdays at 8.00 pm

Thursday meetings programme for the remainder of 2017		
28 September	Hitchin's Victorian Photographers	an illustrated talk by Alan Fleck
26 October	Hitchin's materia medica past	an illustrated talk by Dr David McNamee
23 November	The Best of Old Hitchin on Film 2	compiled and presented by Richard Whitmore, Sam Hallas and Tim Ray
Visits programme for the remainder of 2017. An asterisk (*) indicates a small charge)		
Saturday 5 August 10.30am	* Royston Cave - a guided visit (limit 15)	
Sunday 3 September 2.30pm	Codicote – a guided walk with Nicholas Maddex (15)	
Sunday 10 September 2pm	Hitchin : A Medieval Walk - with Keith Fitzpatrick Matthews (20)	
Sunday 1 October 2pm	Signals Museum – RAF Henlow - a special visit (15)	
Booking is essential for all visits. Please contact David Howlett, programme secretary, for further information.		

Hitchin Historical Society Christmas Party 2017

Don't forget that the Society's annual Christmas party takes place on Friday December 8th commencing at 7.30pm. Further details will be provided with the Autumn edition of the Journal. This is always a memorable occasion with seasonal entertainment provided along with a very generous buffet. A small charge will apply as places are limited. We hope to see you there!

Thank you!

Our thanks as ever go to Messrs **John Shilcock** in Bancroft for providing us with accommodation for our 'overflow' publications stock. Thanks again also to our refreshments team, led by **Jenny Alder**, who provide members with refreshments at member meetings and who also wash up everything afterwards too!

Audrey Stewart stood down as librarian at the 2017 AGM. The Society would like to thank her for all the hard work she has done to keep this service very well organised over many years, for the benefit of members.

A big thank you also goes to all those who have contributed items to this newsletter and also to **Bridget Howlett** and **Phil Rowe** for proof reading ahead of publication.

HHS Committee and Contacts

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Journal	Simon Walker *	Without portfolio	Maureen Sellers
Newsletter	David Dingwall ** newsletter@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk		
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* Co-opted committee members; ** Non-committee contacts

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

HHS website: www.hitchinhistoricals.org.uk