





## 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](http://www.hitchinhistoricals.org.uk)

## Robert Adam architectural drawings

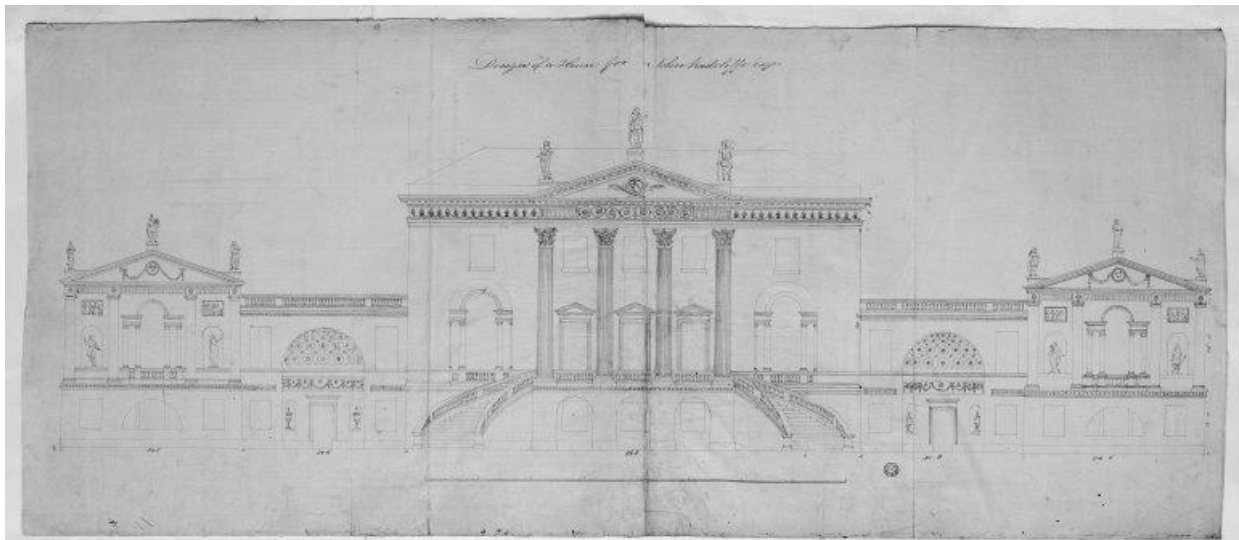
About 15 Society members visited the recently reopened Sir John Soane's museum in Lincoln's Inn Fields, London to see the vast display of antiquities, paintings and objects collected and displayed in what was the home of architect and member of High Society in late 18<sup>th</sup>/early 19<sup>th</sup> 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](http://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 40<sup>th</sup> 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 40<sup>th</sup> 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 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> 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 10<sup>th</sup> was to the Friends House Library and Archive for the purposes of exploring Hitchin's Quaker History. The second was on April 25<sup>th</sup>, with a group visit to Sir John Soane's museum and archives (see page 3 of this newsletter). On April 30<sup>th</sup> 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 8<sup>th</sup> 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 7<sup>th</sup> 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 21<sup>st</sup>) and Little Benslow Hills house and gardens (June 25<sup>th</sup>). 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 1<sup>st</sup> - 31<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> and the Physic Garden Open Day on July 15<sup>th</sup>, **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.

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### **Local History Day – Saturday July 1<sup>st</sup> 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.

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### **Hitchin Railway History Walk – Sunday July 2<sup>nd</sup>. BOOKING ESSENTIAL.**

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

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### **Priory Park Walk – Sunday July 9<sup>th</sup>. BOOKING ESSENTIAL.**

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

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### **Old Hitchin on Film – Tuesday July 11<sup>th</sup>. BOOKING ESSENTIAL.**

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

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### **The Annual Miss Lewis Lecture – Wednesday July 12<sup>th</sup>. 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.

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### **William Ransom Physic Garden Open Day – Saturday July 15<sup>th</sup>. No booking required.**

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

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### **Hitchin’s Blue Plaques Walk – Sunday July 16<sup>th</sup>. BOOKING ESSENTIAL.**

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

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### **The Scilla Douglas Lecture – Wednesday July 19<sup>th</sup>. 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.

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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 13<sup>th</sup> to Saturday July 29<sup>th</sup> 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	<b>Hitchin's Victorian Photographers</b>	an illustrated talk by Alan Fleck
26 October	<b>Hitchin's materia medica past</b>	an illustrated talk by Dr David McNamee
23 November	<b>The Best of Old Hitchin on Film 2</b>	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	* <b>Royston Cave</b> - a guided visit (limit 15)	
Sunday 3 September 2.30pm	<b>Codicote</b> – a guided walk with Nicholas Maddex (15)	
Sunday 10 September 2pm	<b>Hitchin : A Medieval Walk</b> - with Keith Fitzpatrick Matthews (20)	
Sunday 1 October 2pm	<b>Signals Museum – RAF Henlow</b> - a special visit (15)	
<b>Booking is essential for all visits.</b> Please contact David Howlett, programme secretary, for further information. (dhowlett@ymail.com; 01462 434539)		

### Hitchin Historical Society Christmas Party 2017

Don't forget that the Society's annual Christmas party takes place on Friday December 8<sup>th</sup> 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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\* 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](http://www.hitchinhistoricals.org.uk)