



**Hitchin
Historical
Society**

Registered Charity No. 280746

Newsletter

Issue number 51 – June 2018

From the newsletter editor – David Dingwall

It doesn't seem possible that we have hit the half way point of the year, where does the time go?

I am pleased to include several appeals for information in this issue. Whilst it would be fantastic if any members reading this can help with these queries, should you have an idea for a piece of research, do let me know if you would like to put in a request for information in subsequent newsletters.

I regret to report the passing of one of our founder members, Jean Williams, earlier this year. Jean served on the management committee of the society when it was established in 1977 and was the society's first Secretary. To celebrate the 40th anniversary of the society last year, we were pleased to give the honour of cutting the 40th anniversary cake to Jean.

At the society's AGM in March 2018, Pamela Skeggs was elected as secretary, and Mike Clarke was elected to committee, appointed as publications officer. Phil Rowe maintains a position on the committee as a member without portfolio. Congratulations to all!

Whilst a number of meetings and visits have already taken place this year, there is still plenty more to look forward to for the remainder of 2018. In addition to the society events, there are a number of talks and events as part of the 2018 Hitchin Festival programme which members of the society are involved with. Details of these events are included in the newsletter but do refer to the official Hitchin Festival programme for all other events.

From the Chairman – Terry Knight

The number of books and booklets on, or relating to, Hitchin which have been produced down the years I find surprising and this belief has been reinforced since I took charge of the collection amassed by our former and sadly missed secretary, Leslie Mustoe.

After consulting the executor of Leslie's will, Tom Gittens, I suggested to committee members, who agreed, that the way ahead in order to deal with the collection should be as follows: first of all our librarian Debbie Burstow, would take the opportunity to look at every one of the publications and any that either the society does not have or are in better condition should be retained for members to borrow. Once this task has been completed the remainder will be priced by Debbie and then offered for sale at this year's September, October and November meetings. Any remaining will be passed to Andrew and Alison Fell-Gordon who run a second hand book business from their home after formerly trading at the late Eric T. Moore's premises on Bridge Street. Both of them are members.

Money realised from all these sales will then be passed to our treasurer, John Skeeles, for safe keeping until the committee decide what should be done with it. On a personal level I would like to see some form of award purchased in Leslie's memory and for it to be presented once a year at annual general meetings.

This year has seen three more Hitchin books being published. The first, TALES OF THE TOWN A century and a half of Association Football in Hitchin by Neil Fredrik Jensen was followed by Nigel Billingham's THE LIFE OF JAMES RENNIE The Hitchin Colporteur. The launch of this work was attended by Rennie's great granddaughter, Barbara Swain, who is a member of our society. Also present was another member, Christopher Hubbard, who supplied the author with details of the subject's grave which happens to be next to his family's burial plot in Hitchin Cemetery. The third book, The Murder that Defeated Whitechapel's Sherlock Holmes At Mrs. Ridgley's Corner was written by Paul Stickler.

Our society's next production, Discovering More About Hitchin will be launched at the British Schools Museum on Queen Street on 20 October 2018. I have seen the proofs via a laptop and the book promises to be a fitting and lasting tribute to our late president, Scilla Douglas, who did so much for our society and Hitchin as a whole.

Important notice to members - GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations)

Very many thanks to members that promptly returned their form either by email or post. This legislation is necessary to protect individual in the wider world but is onerous on a small society like ours. If you have not yet returned your form, a copy is enclosed with this newsletter. It sounds rather big brother but it is essential that we have your consent so that you can continue to receive journals, newsletters and other matters related to the running of the Society such as visits and special events.

Peter Moss Membership Secretary

Discovering More About Hitchin – THE BOOK – update from Mike Clarke

The boring bit is to say that we are encountering no major problems, no crises or disasters, thankfully. The fourteen authors have been diligent and provided nineteen fact packed chapters. The two editors have slaved away to adjust some of the words and slide in as many illustrations as possible, and produced the first draft. This went to the designer who manipulated the pages and produced a generally pleasing print draft.

Back to the authors who commented on layout and image placement and made occasional corrections. Editors Pauline Humphries and Bridget Howlett made further refinements, then Alan Fleck and Derek Wheeler proof read the whole thing, before we presented Paul, the designer, and Debbie, our production guru, with THE corrected and annotated draft. There had been some debate about how to do the corrections etc. We had been supplied with an electronic draft as a PDF. Whilst I explored how the editors might correct a PDF on their computers, the editors groaned and exposed their dinosaur tendencies, and said they wanted to do it all with pencil and paper. Imagine! They did that, with a memory stick (electronic and not wooden!) of extra text. Paul and Debbie greeted this with a long pause, then “this is a good idea, so much easier to follow than computer things with text boxes which disappear” etc. Purring could be heard from the editors’ corner....

We hope that the book evokes lots of interest, lots of ‘did you know’ and surprise at what has been unearthed. Did you know there was a Hitchin New Town, in 1840? Did you know that a codebreaker for King George III bought up land in Hitchin? Did you..., no, sorry, you will have to buy the book. We will be very pleased to be offering it to you at the launch on 20 October 2018, at a very reasonable price. It will be a good read as the nights draw in, and an early gift for someone at Christmas. And we still don’t know much about the milkman on the motorbike (above right), who will be in the book. Do you? (If you do, please let the newsletter editor know; we may be able to resolve this in time for the book’s publication!)



Two appeals from Simon Walker

Co-operative society tokens from Hitchin and surrounding area

Simon is working on a piece for the Hitchin Journal about co-operative society tokens and their use. He is looking for more examples of local tokens to photograph for the article (he has some already) and would like to appeal to members to let him know if they have any. He has heard that there is a book about the local co-operative societies, and he would be interested in any information anyone can give him about that too.

Walsworth school log books

Simon is trying to track down the log books for Walsworth School. They run from the school's opening in 1852 to 1968. They were at one time housed at Highover School, but there is a suggestion that they may have been passed to a member of Hitchin Historical Society. If you know where they are, or if they are in your possession, please get in touch as Simon is anxious to photograph and transcribe them.

A date for your diary – from Bob Williams

May I draw your attention to a talk which will be delivered at **Holy Saviour Church**, Radcliffe Road at 7.30pm Tuesday 17 July 2018 by Dr Lee Prosser, Curator Historic Royal Palaces. It will be delivered in two parts; the role of the organisation and the Kew Gardens Pagoda restoration project.

Appeal from Brent Smith

There has been a spate of tree-felling in Hitchin. A group of us are going to try to raise awareness of the importance of trees. I am also writing a book about Buildings and Trees, showing that they can get on together. As part of the research for that, I wondered if any members have photographs or information on the following:

- There was an ancient Mulberry Tree in the car park behind the Sun Hotel. It leant over and had a wrought iron support. It was removed in, I think, the 1970s and replaced by the conifer which we now have. I am looking for photos, drawings or any information about it. It was reputed to be over 400 years old.
- The wonderful Indian (perhaps that should be Native American) Bean Tree on the north side of St Mary's. I have been told by one source that it was planted in 1976 but another thinks that it was in the 1960s. Any information please – perhaps photographs when it was a baby or before it was planted.

Spring Visits

In March and April 2018 over sixty members attended visits to Barclays Hitchin, Luton Museum at Wardown Park, Apothecaries' Hall in London and Walsworth House. Experience of both Barclays and Walsworth House was very much angled on how they fit with Hitchin's local history. Wardown included some local content with attention on straw plaiting and Hitchin based artist Theodor Kern and, while the tour of the Apothecaries' Hall was clearly a London focused event, it did remind us of Hitchin's important place in the history of medicinal products and physic.

Society visits for the remainder of 2018 and booking slots: A range of further visits, as detailed in the Programme Card, will be held over the summer. As usual, places will be allocated about a month before each visit is due to take place. If you have asked for a particular slot, and need confirmation as soon as possible whether you have been included, please let David know and he will do his best to balance the demand and supply a little earlier if necessary.



Photos of three society visits in 2018. Left: David Howlett with members at the visit to Barclays Bank, Hitchin (photo D Dingwall); Middle: Walsworth House, East end (photo B Howlett); Right: The Apothecaries Hall (photo N Nicoll).

HHS Committee and Contacts

President	Robert Williams	Film Archive	Richard Whitmore**
Chairman	Terry Knight	Physic Garden	Dr Gerry Tidy
Secretary	Pamela Skeggs	Librarian	Debbie Burstow librarian@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk
Treasurer	John Skeeles	Website Editor	Zena Grant **
Programme	David Howlett *	Publications	Dr Mike Clarke publications@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk
Journal	Simon Walker *	Distribution	Vicki Lockyer
Newsletter	David Dingwall ** newsletter@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk	Without portfolio	Maureen Sellers, Phil Rowe*
Membership	Peter Moss membership@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk		

* Co-opted committee members; ** non-committee contacts



HITCHIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY – PROGRAMME 2018

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

Meetings for the remainder of 2018	
SEPTEMBER 27	Policing in Hertfordshire in the Eighteenth Century – an illustrated talk by Elaine Saunders
OCTOBER 25	Luton’s Medieval Castles – an illustrated talk by Joe Abrams
NOVEMBER 22	Hitchin Films: A Selection – compiled and presented by Richard Whitmore, Sam Hallas and Tim Ray
Visits programme for the remainder of 2018	
Starting times and venues vary. A Booking Form (supplied on membership renewal) must be returned to the Programme Secretary in advance. Places are normally allocated about a month prior to each visit. A charge applies to visits marked with an asterisk (*).	
Saturday 4 August 2.00pm	Cambridge University Botanic Garden – a guided visit [Limit 20 members]*
Sunday 2 September 2.00pm	Historic Potton - a guided walk [Limit 15 members]
Sunday 9 September 2.00pm	Hitchin’s Industrial History – a guided walk with Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews [Limit 20 members]
Sunday 30 September 2.00pm	Walsworth Road Baptist Church – a guided visit [Limit 20 members]
Friday 7 December 7.30pm	Christmas Meeting. Details provided nearer the time.*

Hitchin Festival items 2018

The Miss Lewis Lecture, Wednesday 11 July at 8pm, The Studio, Queen Mother Theatre.

This will be presented by author and former journalist Rodney Tibbs and is titled *Cambridge colleges and their gardens*. This talk is the equivalent of walking through the back of the wardrobe into a series of secret gardens. It also provides a fascinating glimpse into the history of the university and some of the famous names that once walked its streets.

The Scilla Douglas Lecture, Wednesday 18 July at 8pm, The Studio, Queen Mother Theatre.

This will be given by Alison Light, Hon Professor of English at University College, London. She will talk on the theme of *Family History For A Floating World*. Alison has had a varied career as a school teacher, with the BBC and in higher education. She has worked widely on British cultural life and history. Her books include *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars*; *Mrs Woolf and the Servants* and *Common People*; the latter uses her own family history to explore the lives of the working poor and was short listed for the Samuel Johnson Prize in Non-Fiction in 2014.

For both of the above lectures: The venue is the Richard Whitmore Studio, Queen Mother Theatre, Walsworth Road, Hitchin. Tickets, costing £5, are available from the Hitchin Initiative Office, Churchyard, Hitchin.

Hitchin Festival: Other Society Events

In addition to the Miss Lewis and Scilla Douglas Lectures the Society will again be providing three themed walks – **Hitchin’s Railway History** and **Hitchin’s Blue Plaques** on the morning and afternoon respectively of **Sunday 8 July** and **Hitchin Priory Park** on the afternoon of **Sunday 15 July**. We are also helping with Old Hitchin On Film on **Tuesday 10 July**. Details in the Hitchin Festival Programme and tickets (£5 each walk; £6 for the films) from the Hitchin Initiative Office.

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

Finally, thanks go to Messrs John Shilcock in Bancroft for providing us with accommodation for our ‘overflow’ publications stock, Jenny Alder and team for providing refreshments at our meetings and to those who have contributed items for this newsletter.

This newsletter is published 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.