



**Hitchin
Historical
Society**

Registered Charity No. 280746

Newsletter

Issue number 53 – June 2019

From the President – Bob Williams

When invited to become your President nearly two years ago, my first thought was “how on Earth does one follow Scilla Douglas?” My next reaction was what a privilege to be Hitchin Historical Society President for such an historic and important county town. How will I ever be able to make a mark?

I have known our town all my life and moved here to live over 45 years ago. My grandmother was born in nearby Codicote Bury in 1873. She used to tell me, when I was a boy, about her father visiting and talking with a very strange bearded hermit who lived nearby. I think it was then that I became aware of Hitchin. Later I discovered about Hermit Lucas. Some of you will remember Richard Whitmore’s book about the Hermit; perhaps that’s what lifted, along with living in one of our county’s oldest houses, Maydencroft, my interest in local history.

My main ambitions as your President are twofold. Firstly I want to encourage and support those who are currently working on making records of our past more accessible. Thanks to some members with well developed IT skills, we are making good progress in that field. Secondly, history must not be about the past alone, it must be used as a tool in the adventure of mapping out our future. We must encourage the excitement of discovering new found knowledge, the habits, skills and achievements of our forefathers - there’s nothing like it!

Let’s all keep delving, there’s so much more to find, and do please encourage others to join us; old and young, it doesn’t matter, we need the old for their experiences and the young to keep us up to date. It’s a great privilege to be your President and great fun to be associated with such a lively organisation!

From the newsletter editor – David Dingwall

Many society activities have already taken place this year with our programme of monthly meetings and a wide array of visits organised by David Howlett. We take a look back at some of the visits in this issue. Of course there are a number of visits still to come.

Many members will already be aware of the very sad passing of society member Andrew Fell-Gordon in April 2019. A short tribute to Andrew is included on page 2 of this newsletter. Unfortunately two of our Society members, our Chairman, Terry Knight, and former librarian, Audrey Stewart, have both been in hospital recently. The Society wishes them both a speedy recovery.

To conclude, I regret to inform you that this will be my last newsletter I edit for the Society. Due to a combination of work and personal commitments, I have come to the conclusion that I can no longer dedicate the time to producing the newsletter. Thanks to all the Society members who have sent me contributions for the newsletter; this has made my life much easier! I will continue to keep a watchful eye on society developments.

Wanted – Newsletter editor

The Society will require a volunteer to take over production of the newsletters from January 2020 onwards. The editor will need to produce two newsletters a year; one in January and a second in June (just before the Hitchin Festival programme). This is not a committee position but you will receive a lot of support and guidance from committee members. If you would like to take on this task for the society, please speak to a committee member; details can be found on page 3 of this newsletter.

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

Andrew Fell-Gordon

It is with great sadness that we have to report the sudden death of long serving Society member Andrew Fell-Gordon on April 5th 2019. Andrew was a very popular member of the Society and was heavily involved in a number of projects including publications and IT projects. Amongst these projects included one reviewing records of property ownership of Hitchin in 1913. Andrew led a small team of volunteers to input the data from the records into a web portal to ensure this was recorded for posterity. We will greatly miss his presence at Society meetings. His funeral was held at St. Mary's Church, Hitchin on April 24th 2019 with some Society members in attendance. Our thoughts go out to Andrew's wife Alison and all his family.



Hertfordshire Association for Local History – AGM and Spring Meeting – David Howlett

The HALH AGM and Spring Meeting was held in Pirton on May 18th; about 60 people attended along with a number of society stalls. This year's theme was the commemoration of ten years since the death of Lionel Munby, the well-known and well respected extra-mural tutor from the University of Cambridge who inspired the foundation of so many local history societies and research groups in the county. The HHS is no exception in this respect.

Bridget Howlett contributed a short presentation recalling how Lionel's WEA class in Hitchin in the early 1950s had encouraged Tony Foster in his research into local history which eventually, with the support of others, led to the foundation of the HHS in 1977 with Tony as its inaugural Chairman. After Tony's untimely death, Lionel edited his unpublished work to become *Market Town*, the first substantial book produced by the Society. We are very much conscious of Lionel's continued legacy in the society's work.

Hitchin Historical Society AGM – Pamela Skeggs

At the society's AGM on March 28th 2019 Robert Williams was re-appointed President. Terry Knight Chairman, Pamela Skeggs Secretary, John Skeeles Treasurer, Debbie Burstow, Mike Clarke and Vicki Lockyer were all elected unopposed.

The President Robert Williams presented the Reginald Hine Award to the *Discovering More About Hitchin* team: Mike Clarke for publication coordination, Editors, Bridget Howlett and Pauline Humphries and the other authors: Stephen Bradford-Best, Nigel Claydon, Peter Ellis, Alan Fleck, Chris Honey, Bridget Howlett, David Howlett, Christopher Hubbard, Pauline Humphries, Terry Knight, John Lucas, Nafisa Sayany, Janet Walker and Derek Wheeler MBE.

After the formal meeting there was an update on current local history projects.

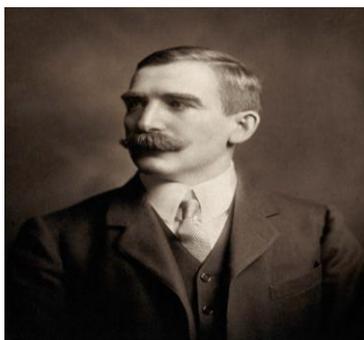
- Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews, Curator and Heritage Access Officer gave an illustrated update about North Hertfordshire Museum.
- Gerry Tidy gave an illustrated presentation on the proposed Digital Archive (*see next item below*).
- Bridget Howlett spoke about "*Discovering More About Hitchin's*" mystery photograph and planned Town Trails for Market Place/Churchyard/High Street and Bucklersbury/Brand Street. One of our members, Joan Armstrong, thinks the milkman is Frederick Harrison who, with his wife, took over Squire's Dairy in Bucklersbury. She also remembers the excellent ice-cream which they sold.

Image-Vault Project – Dr. Gerry Tidy

Hitchin Historical Society is taking a leading role by sponsoring the website for an exciting innovative project to archive images with the aim of collecting, preserving and making available to the members for research and interest. This will be implemented in partnership with NHDC Museum and other local organisations.

We will be looking for volunteers to help with scanning, describing and collating once the project has been formulated. Watch this space!

Annual Miss Lewis Lecture – Dr. Gerry Tidy

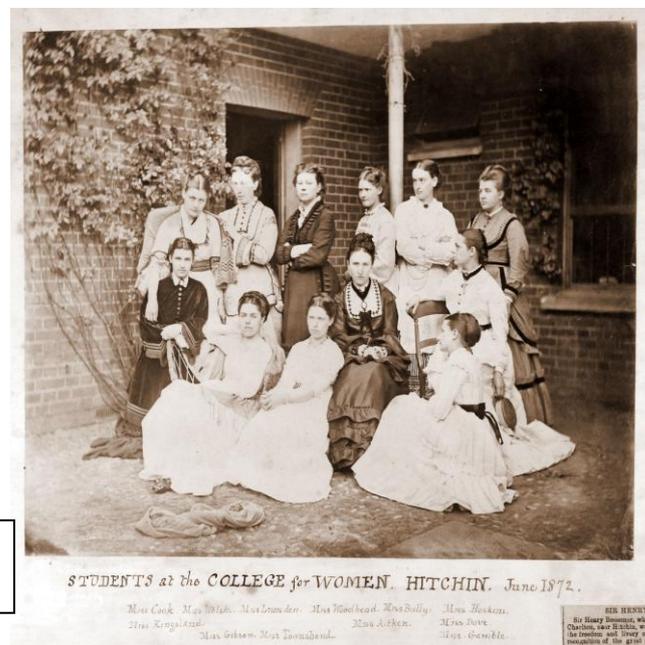


The 2019 Annual Miss Lewis Lecture will be given by Ross McFarlane, Research Development Specialist (Modern) at the Wellcome Collection, London. His lecture is titled '*Henry Wellcome and his life as a pharmacist*'. This will be held on **Wednesday July 17th 2019** at Richard Whitmore Studio, Queen Mother Theatre, Walsworth Road, Hitchin, commencing at **8pm**. Tickets are available at £5 each from Hitchin Initiative. The bar at the Queen Mother Theatre will be open before and after the lecture.

Left: Henry Wellcome (1853 – 1936), the subject of the 2019 Annual Miss Lewis Lecture.

Annual Scilla Douglas Lecture – David Howlett

This year's annual Scilla Douglas Lecture commemorates the 150th anniversary of the foundation at Benslow House, Hitchin of Girton College, Cambridge; the first women's college in the University and a milestone in the development of our system of higher education. Dr. Hazel Mills, Girton College's historian, will talk on *'The Great Scheme: The History of Girton College in Hitchin and Cambridge 1869-1900'* at 8pm on **Wednesday July 3rd 2019** in the Richard Whitmore Studio, Queen Mother Theatre, Walsworth Road. A small display of Girton's early years will accompany the talk and the Theatre bar will be open before and after the lecture. Tickets cost £5 and are available from Hitchin Initiative Office.



Right: photograph of students at the College for Women, Hitchin, June 1872.

Hitchin Historical Society visits programme – Spring 2019

The visits programme began on April 10th with a visit to Two Temple Place, London which included a guided tour of the building and its many treasures. The building was effectively an Estate office, built in the late 19th century for William Waldorf Astor who had made his fortune in America through shipping and fur trading. The architect was one of the late 19th century's greatest exponents of gothic architecture, John Loughborough Pearson. At the time of the society's visit, there was also an exhibition of paintings and sketches by John Ruskin.

Two other visits outside Hitchin have taken place so far in 2019. The first was a visit to the De Havilland Aircraft Museum at Salisbury Hall, London Colney on April 30th. Then on May 21st there was a visit to the museum and archive of Girton College, Cambridge. The college of course has connections with Hitchin's local history as the College for Women was originally established at Benslow House, Hitchin in 1869. The move to Cambridge occurred four years later in 1873.

There have also been four visits closer to home in Hitchin. These included a guided tour of Walsworth House courtesy of Tom McCall on April 28th. Then on May 26th the Hitchin Physic Gardeners welcomed a group to the William Ransom Physic Garden. A guided walk was hosted by society member Nafisa Sayany on June 2nd around Gaping Hills Lane. Finally on June 15th a visit was hosted at Queen Street Grace Baptist Church courtesy of Pastor Tom Forryan.

The good news is that there are still further visits to come in 2019. Although members should have received details of these visits when renewing membership of the society, if you have not booked on any visits and wish to do so, please contact David Howlett to check availability. Contact details at the bottom of page 4 of this newsletter.



From left to right: Walsworth House; De Havilland Aircraft Museum; and Girton College, Cambridge (photos Bridget Howlett). Two Temple Place (Photo: David Dingwall).

Local History Day

Hitchin Historical Society will be hosting its third biennial History Day on **Saturday July 13th 2019** at **Church House, Hitchin from 10am to 4 pm**. Local heritage, history and civic groups will introduce their organisations to the public and will include a selection of stalls and displays connected with the history of Hitchin and its district. It is free admission on the day. All welcome.

Save the date: Hitchin Historical Society's *Christmas event* takes place on Friday December 6th at 7:30pm. Further details will be included in the October 2019 journal. A small charge will apply.



HITCHIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY – PROGRAMME 2019

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

| Meetings for the remainder of 2019 | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| SEPTEMBER 26 | In search of Clofesho: an aspect of Hitchin's Saxon history – an illustrated talk by Clifford Offer |
| OCTOBER 24 | The Battle for Female Suffrage: Mary Augusta Ward and Lady Constance Georgina Bulwer-Lytton – an illustrated talk by Elizabeth Eastwood |
| NOVEMBER 28 | Old Hitchin on Film: Another selection – compiled and presented by Sam Hallas and Tim Ray |

Hitchin Festival 2019

The Scilla Douglas Lecture, Wednesday 3 July at 8pm, The Studio, Queen Mother Theatre.

This will be given by Dr. Hazel Mills, College Historian at Girton College, Cambridge. She will talk on *'The Great Scheme – The History of Girton College in Hitchin and Cambridge 1869 – 1900'*.

The Miss Lewis Lecture, Wednesday 17 July at 8pm, The Studio, Queen Mother Theatre.

This will be presented by Ross McFarlane, Research Development Specialist (Modern) at the Wellcome Collection, London and is titled *'Henry Wellcome and his life as a pharmacist'*.

Tickets for both of the above lectures cost £5.

'Hitchin Films: Old Hitchin' presented with Hitchin Film Club, Tuesday 9 July at 8pm, The Studio, Queen Mother Theatre. The venue is the same as detailed above. Tickets cost £6.

For the above events: The venue is the Richard Whitmore Studio, Queen Mother Theatre, Walsworth Road, Hitchin. Tickets are available from the Hitchin Initiative Office, Churchyard, Hitchin.

Hitchin Festival: Other Society Events

Two walks will be hosted by David and Bridget Howlett respectively as part of the festival programme. Tickets for both walks cost £5 and are available from the Hitchin Initiative Office:

'Hitchin's Railway History', Sunday 7 July at 9.30am.

'Hitchin's Priory Park', Sunday 14 July at 2pm.

Physic Garden open day, Saturday 6 July 11am – 2pm. Admission free.

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.

HHS Committee and Contacts

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|-------------------|--|
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| Journal | Simon Walker * |
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|--------------------------|--|
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