



**Hitchin
Historical
Society**

Registered Charity No. 280746

Newsletter

Issue number 59 – July 2022

Message from the Chairman – Dr Barry Arends

It's rather daunting taking over as chairman after such illustrious names as Scilla Douglas and Terry Knight however I will do my best.

Things are getting back to normal with a face-to-face committee meeting the other day after months of zoom, which does have its advantages, not having to go out on a dark winter's evening, but I think most feel that it lacks warmth and sociability. Talking about the committee I am truly impressed by the energy and commitment of its members and feel very supported. To state a truism nothing can happen without one and I'm looking forward to our next series of lectures, beginning in September and outings.

Regarding outings I was lucky enough to go on the one to the Linnean Society, Piccadilly, the world's oldest active society devoted to natural history, and which takes its name from Carl Linnaeus (1707 – 1778) whose botanical, zoological and library collections are now held by the Society. It was a great delight to see the handwritten diaries of Linnaeus, some of his stored specimens and a beautifully illustrated book of Parrots done by Edward Lear – yes, the man who wrote the 'Owl and the Pussycat' amongst others.

Here we go round the mulberry bush



Some of you may have noticed that earlier this year the William Ransom Physic Garden was closed for several weeks. This was due to a mulberry tree root disrupting the path. Thanks to Alan Fleck this has now been sorted and we are open again. Indeed, it is Alan who opens and closes the gates, clips the yew hedge, clears up after out of hours litter bugs and generally keeps an eye on the garden.

Mulberry trees originated in South East Asia. They were introduced into this country in the 17th century by James the First in a failed attempt to provide the leaves as food for silkworms to boost the industry. Unfortunately, the black mulberry

(like ours) was imported whereas silkworms like the white variety! The juicy fruit of the mulberry is used to make wine and jam also as a food colouring. The fruits have a laxative effect.

The nursery rhyme "here we go round the mulberry bush" is said to be derived from prisoners exercising in their yards although it is likely that originally it was a bramble bush as the mulberry never forms a bush.

Gerry Tidy

Programme News: Back to Normal, Refreshments and the Society Library

It has been good to get back into the stride of a 'normal' Programme year since January. We have had good attendances at the Meetings and Visits organised so far.

On Visits, please remember that it is still not too late to send in your blue Booking Form; allocations are normally made about a month before the due dates so there are still slots remaining for forthcoming activities.

At a recent Committee Meeting it was decided it is time we resumed 'normal' refreshment and Library provision at the Church House meetings. From the September, therefore, we will once again be providing both refreshments after the speaker and routine access to the Society's Library collection at Church House each month.

HHS: Hitchin Festival Events July 2022

In recent years the Society has usually arranged a number of contributions to the annual *Hitchin Festival* programme. There will be, therefore, a number of HHS events this July -

- Sunday 10 July @ 9.30 am – Hitchin's Railway History: a guided walk with David Howlett - £5 Sponsor: Hitchin Historical Society.
- Tuesday 12 July @ 5.45 pm – Hitchin: A Royal Manor in Film commemorating the Queen's Platinum Jubilee at the Richard Whitmore Studio, Queen Mother Theatre, Walsworth Road - £6 Sponsor: Hitchin Film Club and Hitchin Historical Society.
- Thursday 14 July @ 8.00 pm – John Bunyan: a Pilgrim's Progress - a talk by Stan Evers at the Grace Baptist Church, Bethel Chapel, Queen Street - Free but Booking Essential Sponsors: Grace Baptist Church and Hitchin Historical Society.
- Sunday 17 July @ 2.00 pm – Hitchin Priory Park: a guided walk with Bridget Howlett - £5 Sponsor: Hitchin Historical Society.
- Wednesday 20 July @ 8.00 pm – The Miss Lewis Lecture: Naming Nature – Carl Linneaus and the Linnean Society of London – an illustrated talk by Dr Isabelle Charmentier, Head of Collections, The Linnean Society, at the Richard Whitmore Studio, Queen Mother Theatre, Walsworth Road - £5 Sponsor: Hitchin Historical Society.
- Wednesday 27 July @ 8.00 pm – The Scilla Douglas Lecture: The Birth of the English Kitchen 1600-1850 – an illustrated talk by Dr Sara Pennell, University of Greenwich, at the Richard Whitmore Studio, Queen Mother Theatre, Walsworth Road - £5 Sponsor: Hitchin Historical Society.

TICKETS are available -

** on-line from 1 June (via the Hitchin Festival website - www.hitchinfestival.co.uk) and

** face-to-face from 14 June (at the Hitchin Festival Box Office Hitchin Information, 1a Churchyard on Tuesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays 1030-1400).

Programme 2022

Meetings held at Church House, Churchyard, Hitchin on Thursdays at 8.00 pm

- 22 September - Apsley Cherry-Garrard: Hertfordshire's Antarctic Explorer - an illustrated talk by Chris Bennett.
- 27 October - Roman Purwell - an illustrated talk by Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews.
- 24 November - Hitchin's Times and Seasons: Daily Life in a Country Town - an illustrated talk by Richard Field.
- 1 December Christmas Meeting. Details provided nearer the time. A small charge will apply.

David Howlett – Programme Secretary

Annual General Meeting.

At the society's AGM in March, Robert Williams was re-appointed President. Barry Arends Chairman, Pamela Skeggs Secretary, John Skeeles Treasurer, Debbie Burstow, Nora Evans, Trevor Groom, Tony Read, Phil Rowe and Maureen Sellers were elected.

The President Robert Williams presented the Reginald Hine Award to Terry Knight for his services to the town of Hitchin and to the Society since it was formed in 1977. His knowledge of the town's history is prodigious, and his research thorough and wide-ranging.



Photo by Phil Rowe

After the business of the meeting, members were able to enjoy a talk by Nicky Nicol who spoke about the Physic Garden Herbarium.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed items for this newsletter. If you would like to submit an article for the newsletter, please email me. However, cannot guarantee every suggestion will be used.

Pamela Skeggs – Secretary

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* Co-opted committee members ** By standing invitation

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HHS website: www.hitchinhistoricals.org.uk

A bonus for HHS website users: two pictures of the Physic Garden recently taken by Bridget Howlett, one of the regular team of dedicated gardeners

