



**Hitchin
Historical
Society**

Registered Charity No. 280746

Newsletter

Issue number 60 – January 2023

HERTFORDSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY SYMPOSIUM NOVEMBER 2022

Wining and Dining in Hertfordshire

This year's annual gathering of local historians from across Hertfordshire took place on a pleasant November day at the Katherine Warington School in Harpenden. An excellent buffet lunch well as tea and coffee were served in the area where book stalls (including the Hitchin Historical Society stall) tempted us to part with our money.

The first talk by John Broad '*Bread and Ale: the barley trade and the growing of grain*' emphasized that the staple diet of much of the population was bread and ale or beer until the early 19th century. During the 18th century Hertfordshire was the prime source for brown malt needed for the production of porter by major London brewers such as Truman, Whitbread and Barclay Perkins. Though the most important town for malting was Ware, linked by the River Lea to London, Hitchin and Baldock were also significant centres of this trade.

An innovation was that the next talk was delivered by Zoom by Malcolm Thick assisted by his wife. The technology in the capable hands of Kris Lockyear worked well. We were introduced to '*William Ellis, Eighteenth century Farmer, Journalist and Entrepreneur*' of Little Gaddesden, whose biography Malcolm has recently published. We were treated to descriptions of some of the Hertfordshire recipes appearing in his writings including Hertfordshire Bacon pancakes, plain cheap pancakes for farmers' families, water pancakes for poor people, pancakes for rich people and apple pancakes for the gentry. He also gave instructions on how to make Hertfordshire nuts, believed to be the earliest recipe for doughnuts.

More descriptions of food and recipes followed given by Sue Flood based on the recently published diaries 1798-1812, of John Carrington, farmer of Bramfield, and by Heather Falvey, on '*Cucumbers, curry and doughnuts: some of Elizabeth Dimsdale's recipes*.' These described how to make curry powder or alternatively where it could be bought.

A contrast to this more lavish eating was Sheila White's talk on '*Frumenty and Hasty pudding: 18th century parish workhouse fare*'. Hasty pudding, so called because it was cheap and quick to make, comprised flour and water. John Broad and Sue Flood had already spoken about the hardship caused by the rocketing price of bread in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, as a result of the French wars and poor harvests. John Carrington sold some of his grain cheaply to the poor.

Richard Simons gave a fascinating talk about the butchers' shop run by five generations of his family in Abbots Langley. He now lives in this former shop and, while converting it into a house, he found a butcher's day book concealed behind the fittings. This provided a valuable insight into the customers and the meat provided.

The final talk was back to lavish feasting with a description by Philip Sheail of a banquet given to the Herts Rifle Volunteers soon after they were formed in the 1860s. Their life was not all as indulgent – he also talked about catering arrangements when they held their annual manoeuvres.

Bridget Howlett

The book 'Take 6 Carrots, 4 Heads of Celery, 8 Large Onions...' Recipes collected by the Wilshire family of Hitchin edited and adapted by Maya Pieris and published by the Hitchin Historical Society was on sale at the Symposium.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL 2023

Dear Member,

If you are an annually paying member, you will find a membership renewal form with this newsletter, and you are invited to renew your Hitchin Historical Society Membership for 2023.

We hope that you continue to feel that membership of the society is a worthwhile experience, and that you will wish to continue, and I look forward to receiving your renewal.

Please either:

- (a) complete the enclosed renewal form and send it with payment and a stamped addressed envelope for receipt of your 2023 Membership Card and Visits Booking Form, or
- (b) help us avoid bank charges, and pay by bank transfer, as set out on the form, and email me to let me know you have done so. Your 2023 Membership Card and Visits Booking Form will be posted to you.

Yours sincerely,

Trevor W. Groom

Membership Secretary

PROGRAMME FOR 2023: SOME POINTERS

The 2023 Programme comprises the usual mix of talks and visits. Most are self-explanatory but a few need amplification - the Linnean Society visit (repeated as last year we were oversubscribed) will include a small display of items related to Robert Bentley, the influential but little known Hitchin botanist and member of the Society; the David Parr House is a very unusual sidelight on High Victorian church decoration and a practitioner of its art; Minsden Chapel is accessible only by a walk from Chapelfoot and the visit to Elstow will include reference to Hitchin's medieval links with the Abbey and to John Bunyan.

If you have any questions on what is planned, please contact the Programme Secretary

TREE INFORMATION LABELS - the next chapter



For decades it has been an idea to introduce information labels on the trees at Payne's Park.

This was particularly highlighted by the lovely sight of the Snowman with a carpet of ginkgo leaves outside the library.

Ginkgo biloba, commonly known as **ginkgo** or **gingko** also known as the **maidenhair tree**, is a species of tree native to **China**. It is the last living species in the order **Ginkgoales**, which first appeared over 290 million years ago. Fossils very similar to the living species, belonging to the genus **Ginkgo**, extend back to the **Middle Jurassic** approximately 170 million years ago. The tree was cultivated

early in **human history** and remains commonly planted.

The genus name is regarded as a misspelling of the **Japanese pronunciation** *gin kyo* for the **kanji** meaning "silver apricot", which is found in **Chinese herbology** literature such as Daily Use **Materia Medica** (1329) and **Compendium of Materia Medica** published in 1578.

Ransom Naturals now headquartered in Wilbury Way Hitchin continue to market it.

"Our Ginkgo Biloba extract was designed and extracted starting from the leaves of the Ginkgo Tree. This product has been traditionally used for centuries to treat all sorts of ailments. We believe that it does you good and it tastes just great. Characteristic flavours in Ginkgo Biloba are much like herbal teas where there is a right combination of herbal taste, astringency, woody notes, and a green-like aftertaste. Common applications for the ginkgo Biloba extract include carbonated soft drinks where the flavour comes to life or as a natural flavour ingredient in flavoured waters".

Gerry Tidy

HITCHIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY - PROGRAMME 2023

MEETINGS 2023

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

26 JANUARY	<u>WILLIAM WILSHERE: HITCHIN LAWYER, FARMER AND PHILANTHROPIST</u> – an illustrated talk by Bridget Howlett
23 FEBRUARY	<u>HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT: HITCHIN'S GABLE SHOPS</u> – an illustrated talk by Hugh Madgin
23 MARCH	<u>AGM AND MEMBERS' EVENING</u> - including updates on current projects
27 APRIL	<u>THE WOOL MERCHANTS OF HERTFORDSHIRE</u> - an illustrated talk by Brendan King
25 MAY	<u>MINSDEN CHAPEL</u> – an illustrated talk by Rachel Arnold
28 SEPTEMBER	<u>GREAT BRITISH PARKS</u> – an illustrated talk by Paul Rabbitts
26 OCTOBER	<u>HITCHIN AND THE BOGDANIS: Lords of the Manor in the eighteenth century</u> – an illustrated talk by Dr Dustin Frazier Wood
23 NOVEMBER	<u>HITCHIN THROUGH ITS ARTISTS' EYES</u> – an illustrated talk by Ros Allwood

VISITS 2023

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 ()*

<u>Sunday 23 April</u> at 2.00 pm	<u>THE CHILTERN AND WYMONDLEY ROAD</u> – a walk with Keith Leaver [Limit: 12 members]
<u>Wednesday 26 April</u> at 2.00 pm	* <u>THE LINNEAN SOCIETY</u> , Piccadilly, London W1 - a guided visit with Dr Isabelle Charmantier [Limit: 24 members]
<u>Saturday 20 May</u> at 2.00 pm	<u>THE DAVID PARR HOUSE, CAMBRIDGE</u> – a guided visit [Limit: 12 members]
<u>Tuesday 23 May</u> at 2.00 pm	<u>HITCHIN PRIORY</u> - a guided visit with Bridget Howlett and Liz Hunter [Limit: 20 members]
<u>Monday 5 June</u> at 2.00 pm	<u>BRITISH SCHOOLS MUSEUM AND COLLECTIONS, HITCHIN</u> - a special guided visit [Limit: 24 members]
<u>Sunday 25 June</u> at 2.00 pm	<u>HITCHIN QUAKER MEETING HOUSE</u> - a guided visit [Limit: 15 members]
<u>Sunday 30 July</u> at 2.00 pm	<u>MINSDEN CHAPEL</u> – a guided visit with Rachel Arnold [Limit: 15 members]
<u>Sunday 20 August</u> at 2.00 pm	<u>ELSTOW MOOT HALL AND VILLAGE</u> - a guided visit with Curator Clive Arnold [Limit: 20 members]
<u>Saturday 2 September</u> at 2.00 pm	<u>HOLY SAVIOUR HITCHIN</u> : a guided visit with Alan Fleck [Limit: 25 members]
<u>Sunday 24 September</u> at 2.00 pm	<u>ROMAN PURWELL</u> - a guided walk with Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews [Limit: 20 members]
<u>Sunday 1 October</u> at 2.00 pm	<u>BENSLOW AND NETTLEDELL</u> : a Victorian garden suburb? - a guided walk with Bridget and David Howlett [Limit: 15 members]

SPECIAL MEETINGS 2023

Starting times and venues vary. A charge applies to events marked with an asterisk ().*

Wednesday 12 July at 8.00 pm	* THE SCILLA DOUGLAS LECTURE Details in the Hitchin Festival Programme
Wednesday 19 July at 8.00 pm	* THE MISS LEWIS LECTURE Details in the Hitchin Festival Programme
Friday 1 December at 7.30pm	* CHRISTMAS MEETING Details provided nearer the time

SEASONAL CLOSURE OF THE PHYSIC GARDEN



Not everyone might know that the garden is opened and closed each day by Alan Fleck. Most of you will know Alan as a former Hitchin Museum curator and a prime mover in establishing the garden. He also keeps an eye on “out of hours” visitors and clears up their litter!

At this chilly time of year there is little to see and so there are few visitors to the garden.

The paths can also be treacherous after heavy frosts. We have decided to close the garden until the end of January 2023.

The garden volunteers will still access for maintenance – where would we be without their year-round care.

Stop Press No sooner had we closed the garden than we were blanketed with snow – probably not connected!

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If you have an item, you would like to submit to the Newsletter please email newsletter@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk

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 website: www.hitchinhistoricals.org.uk