



**Hitchin  
Historical  
Society**

Registered Charity No. 280746

# Newsletter

**Issue number 61 – June 2023**

## **VISITS OVER THE SUMMER**

The Society is, as usual, arranging a number of visits over the summer months (see the Programme listing on your membership card or look at the website). Allocations are normally made about four weeks before each due date; it is still not too late to send in the green Visits Booking Form 2023.

## **HITCHIN FESTIVAL: JULY 2023 – HHS EVENTS**

The Society has again planned a number of events for the annual Hitchin Festival in July:

- **Wednesday 12 July** at 8.00 pm – **The Scilla Douglas Lecture:** The invention of public space in Victorian and Edwardian England from railings to benches – an illustrated talk by Professor Katrina Navickas, University of Hertfordshire, at the Richard Whitmore Studio, Queen Mother Theatre, Walsworth Road - £5 per ticket.
- **Saturday 15 July** from 10.30 am to 3.30 pm – **History Day** with stalls from local heritage, history and civic societies at Church House, Churchyard – *Free admission with no booking required.*
- **Saturday 15 July** from 1.00 pm to 3.00 pm – **Hitchin Physic Garden Open Afternoon** – explore this fascinating garden and learn about the medicinal use of plants and Hitchin's pharmaceutical history. Located near the Library, Paynes Park. *Free admission with no booking required.*
- **Wednesday 19 July** at 8.00 pm – **The Miss Lewis Lecture:** The petticoat peril: exploring women in pharmacy history – an illustrated talk by Briony Hudson at the Richard Whitmore Studio, Queen Mother Theatre, Walsworth Road - £5 per ticket.

**Tickets** (£5 each) are required for both the Scilla Douglas and Miss Lewis Lectures.

These can be obtained in advance via the Festival website ([www.hitchinfestival.co.uk](http://www.hitchinfestival.co.uk)) or in person at the Festival Booking Office, Hitchin Information, 1a Churchyard, between 10.00 am and 4.00 pm Monday to Saturday. Printed copies of the programme also now available.

## **PROGRAMME 2023**

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

- **28 September** – **Great British Parks** – an illustrated talk by Paul Rabbitts.
- **26 October** - **Hitchin and The Bogdanis:** Lords of the Manor in the eighteenth century – an illustrated talk by Dr Dustin Frazier Wood.
- **23 November** – **Hitchin through its Artists' eyes** - an illustrated talk by Ros Allwood.
- **Friday 1 December at 7.30pm** - **Christmas meeting.** Details provided nearer the time. A small charge will apply.

*David Howlett – Programme Secretary*

## **ANOTHER HITCHIN HISTORY PLAY DURING THE FESTIVAL –**

### **ANNE & MATILDA**

Kirk Foster, a long term Society member and founder-writer-producer of the Market Theatre in Sun Street, is mounting another of his Hitchin History plays during this year's Festival. Entitled 'Anne and Matilda' it explores the stories of the two daughters of painter Samuel Lucas Senior and their time in Italy. Kirk's Hitchin plays are always entertaining, informative, and well grounded in our town's local history - and sometimes the HHS even gets a mention on stage (!). Well worth a look.

The play runs between 13<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> July and bookings can be made via the Market Theatre website, Hitchin Festival website, or in person at Hitchin Information. *See page 1.*

## **HITCHIN HISTORY & THE HERTFORDSHIRE RECORD SOCIETY:**

### **WILLIAM WILSHERE**

This October the Hertfordshire Record Society is publishing Bridget Howlett's transcription and annotation (with contribution from Tom Williamson, University of East Anglia) of William Wilshere's farming and gardening memoranda books compiled between 1809 and 1824. Wilshere - lawyer, farmer and philanthropist - was a key Hitchin personality and his memoranda provide an unusual and important source for students of agriculture and gardening as well as providing major lights on our town's local history.

*David Howlett*

## **LAURIE HUGHES: A MAJOR ROLE IN THE HHS**

Several Society members attended a moving and affectionate family commemoration of Laurie Hughes at the Hitchin British Schools on 4 April. Laurie sadly died on 6 May 2020 aged 90 but at the time epidemic restrictions prevented events marking a full recognition of his very full life (see also the note on the HHS website for 7 June 2020).

Laurie (together with his wife Dorothy) was a truly stalwart supporter of the HHS over very many years. He became involved almost at the outset of the Society's foundation and successively filled key roles: Programme Secretary, Secretary and Treasurer. To all these, plus much 'behind the scenes' effort, he brought a natural and energetic talent for organisation which set the Society in good stead and laid firm foundations from which we are still benefiting today. In recent years Laurie had taken a lower profile but was still active in supporting member's research and in delivering *Hitchin Journals* and other necessary paperwork on his own 'distribution round'. To those of us who knew him in his most active phases Laurie's enthusiasm for Hitchin and its history and his preparedness to work hard at all sorts of levels in its support will be long remembered.

*Bridget Howlett*

## **THE LOCAL HISTORIAN**

HHS members are probably aware of the existence of *The Local Historian*, a wonderful source of material on a vast range of local history subjects published four times each year by the British Association for Local History. Some articles are specific to a particular period or geographical region, others to a specific historical subject.

The Society has a collection of copies going back many years, right up to the latest issue. These are available to borrow from the Society library at our monthly Church House meetings. To help you find an issue that might interest you, we have started to put a complete list of articles on our website. Contents of the last five years' issues are now available to browse, and we're adding more all the time. Do have a look, see what articles interest you, and ask our librarians at any Church House HHS meeting.

*Phil Rowe - Website Editor*

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

At the society's AGM on Thursday 23 March, Robert Williams was re-appointed President. Barry Arends Chairman, Pamela Skeggs Secretary, John Skeeles Treasurer, Vicki Locker, and Gerry Tidy were elected.

Following the business part of the meeting, the recipient of the annual Reginald Hine award was announced. Simon Walker was unable to attend in person to receive the award, which was in recognition of his editorship of the *Hitchin Journal* over many years, and for his research into early copies of the *Journal*, leading to the publication of *Hitchin – Glimpses of the Past* and *More Glimpses of the Past*.

Our Chairman, Barry Arends presented a Chairman's (occasional) Award and a cheque for £200 to local artist James Willis who, together with fellow artist Carl Laubin, had created an exhibition "Back to the Drawing Board" of their art works, held at the North Herts Museum from October 2022 to January 2023.

Bridget Howlett gave the first of three presentations on current projects. Bridget has been working with Michael McCartney, archivist for the former St Michael's RC College in Hitchin, on the Hitchin Roll of Honour 1939-1945 held at St Mary's Church.

The Old Michaellean Association has paid for Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies to digitise the entire volume, and to produce a conservation report, advising on how it should be preserved and displayed. The Roll of Honour has been returned to St Mary's where it is once more on display, in the Trinity Chapel.

Simon Maddison and Mark Hodgson spoke on the subject of Hitchin's two surviving pillboxes, now over eighty years old. Simon, Mark, and a dedicated band of local volunteers have done a considerable amount of work in making these historic structures visible by the removal of a huge amount of invasive vegetation. *See website for more info.*

Gerry Tidy spoke about the planning for this year's History Day *See page 1.*

**Pamela Skeggs – Secretary**

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## HHS COMMITTEE

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\* Co-opted committee members \*\* By standing invitation

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## NEWSLETTER

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

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

