



**Hitchin  
Historical  
Society**

Registered Charity No. 280746

# Newsletter

**Issue number 62 – January 2024**

## **CHRISTMAS MEETING 2023**



The Society's Christmas meeting was held on the evening of Friday 1<sup>st</sup> December at Church House. An excellent seasonal buffet was supplemented with a Chairman's Quiz, an illustrated talk by Bridget Howlett on 'William Wilshere's Food' including flavours of his Christmas fare and Georgian dining in Hitchin more generally and a raffle (raising £104) in aid of our local Samaritans branch based in Paynes Park. Almost sixty members attended. the picture shows Bridget in full flow.

*(Photo: Stephen Bradford-Best)*

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## **WEBSITE EDITOR**

The HHS website is a significant window to the outside world, giving viewers an insight into who we are and what we do. It's therefore most important that it looks attractive, and that it is kept up to date.

We use WordPress as our "content management system", and it is really much like any other text and image editor, though it takes a little while to get used to its particular way of doing things. Anyone happy using a word processor should not have much trouble transferring that skill to WordPress.

Although much of the information on the site is static, things like News Items, dates for next meetings, changes to committee personnel are the bread and butter of the job - perhaps no more than an hour or two each week. The new society programme of meetings and outings each year involves a more concentrated effort, of course.

Remember that the website editor is just that. Others on the committee are responsible for providing the editor with 'copy'. Part of the job will involve a little 'chasing' now and again!

Phil, our retiring Website Editor, will be happy to work with whoever takes on the job for as long as it takes for them to get their feet securely and happily under the computer desk!

## HITCHIN'S CONSERVATION AREAS

Over ten years ago, in 2009-10, the Society helped with a thorough review of Hitchin's Conservation Area. This was first designated in 1969 with the aim of safeguarding the historic character of the town centre at a time when modern 'development' was accelerating. The town is a living organism and has to change in order to survive but it is important that decisions on such changes are made in a context fully aware of Hitchin's undoubted importance as a classic 'historic market town'. The Conservation Area acts as vital background for the deliberations of the local authorities' planners and, ideally, for those proposing changes too.

The original Conservation Area was reviewed in 1997-98 but it was soon clear that further work was needed. The re-examination of 2009-10 was ably coordinated by a firm of architectural and planning specialists (The Conservation Studio) who consulted widely and held information events on possible alterations to the Area. The result of these deliberations was the adoption, in 2011, of a set of new Conservation Area frameworks -

- \* Hitchin Conservation Area (the main Town Centre area)
- \* Hitchin Butts Close Conservation Area
- \* Hitchin Hill Path Conservation Area
- \* Hitchin Railway and Ransom's Recreation Ground Conservation Area
- \* Hitchin Register of Buildings of Local Interest

At the time much attention was rightly paid to the review exercise, its successful conclusion, and its formal adoption as policy by North Hertfordshire District Council. Some recent discussions on local developments have highlighted, however, that that profile is no longer as high as it should be. The Society has decided, therefore, to include the set of very useful, and statutorily based, 2011 Conservation Area documents in our Website Links section for wider and more accessible access; the link is also listed here – [north-herts.gov.uk/hitchin-conservation-area](http://north-herts.gov.uk/hitchin-conservation-area).

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## INTREPID HISTORICALS MANNING TOWN CENTRE STALL



On 2 December, Hitchin Historical Society held one of its occasional stalls in the High Street. Making some of the Society's publications available and encouraging knowledge of the historical nature of our town, these events have also proved effective in bringing new members to the Society.

*(Photo: Stephen Bradford Best)*



# WILLIAM WILSHERE'S HITCHIN FARM AND GARDEN, 1809-1824

Edited by Bridget Howlett and with an Introduction

by Bridget Howlett and Tom Williamson

Published by the Hertfordshire Record Society in October 2023 (price £22).

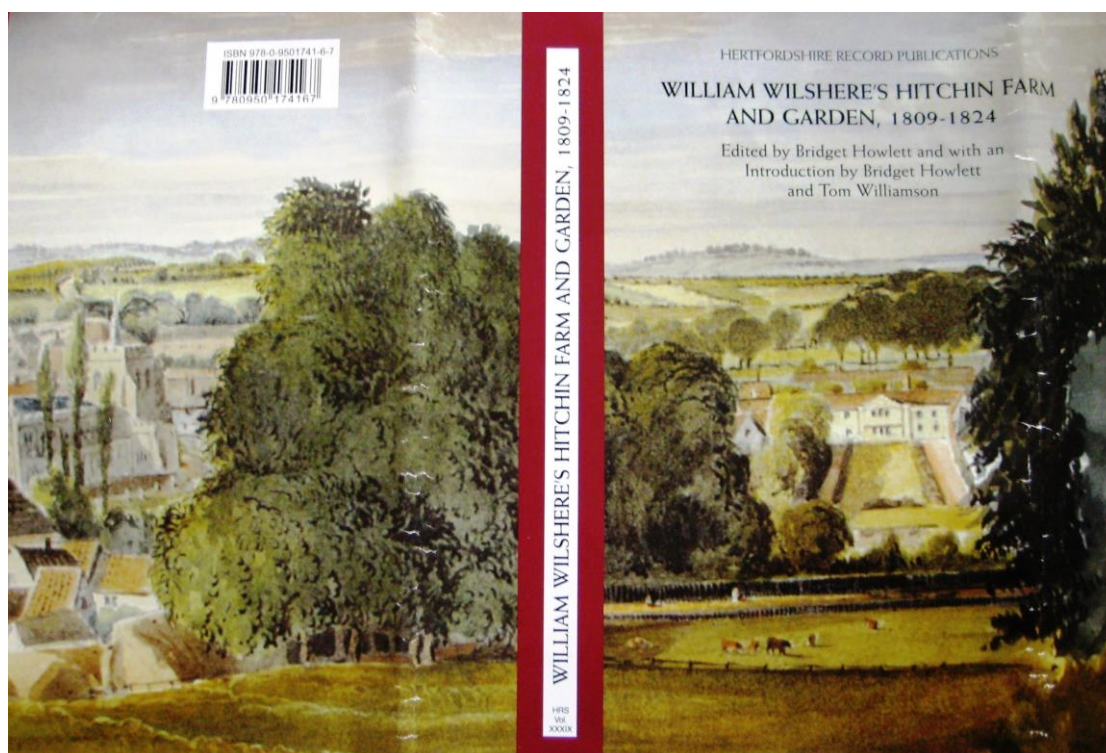
A book launch is to be held at the British Schools Museum at 5pm on Thursday 14 March 2024 when Bridget Howlett will give a short talk and drinks and nibbles will be served. A small charge of £3 to cover costs will be made. See the British Schools website for further information.

William Wilshere (1754-1824) was a Hitchin lawyer chiefly remembered as the founder of the Hitchin British Schools. According to William Lucas, the Quaker brewer, Wilshere 'began life with but little property but by his address, assiduity & superior abilities - - - acquired much wealth & influence' becoming 'the most eminent public character of this town & neighbourhood.' He 'was very kind to the poor'. By his later years Wilshere was farming about 120 acres, mainly to the east of the town, principally for arable crops. This volume contains transcripts of Wilshere's *Farm and Gardening Memoranda* spanning the years 1809 to 1824.

Not only do the memoranda shed light on up-to-date agriculture on the Hertfordshire chalklands in the early nineteenth century, but also show that Wilshere was clearly farming with an eye to the local urban market. He grew not only wheat, barley and fodder, but also large quantities of crops such as carrots and potatoes, while pigs and poultry loom large - aspects of contemporary agriculture all too frequently ignored by historians. The wealth of varieties named - especially of potatoes - is unusual and Wilshere's comments on such things as the cultivation of canary seed and on keeping turkeys are also of some significance.

Garden historians will find much to interest them. As well as providing useful lists of varieties, Wilshere records the local and London based nurseries from which his plants were obtained. Also included in the volume is the Journal kept by Wilshere's gardener, James Bowie, from 1812 until 1814 with a 'List of Trees, Seeds etc Sown, planted etc in the Garden of William Wilshere Esq. at Hitchin, Herts, by James Bowie 1813'. Bowie left Wilshere in August 1814 when sent by Sir Joseph Banks on a plant hunting expedition to Brazil and South Africa. Bills listing plants supplied by Robert Murray of Hertford and Henry Hodgson of Hitchin have also been transcribed. Together, these sources provide vital insights into the gardening activities of a middle-class individual, at a time when most of our evidence for garden history relates to the properties of large landowners.

The first part of the Introduction by Bridget Howlett provides historical detail on both Wilshere and Hitchin. Tom Williamson, Professor of Landscape History at the University of East Anglia, sets the memoranda in their local and national contexts. Biographical Notes of local people, a Glossary, Bibliography and comprehensive Indexes of Names, Places and Subjects and full colour images of maps of Wilshere's properties drawn up in c1808 and 1818, are also included.



## SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP

At the beginning of the year membership stood at 361 and we have welcomed 32 new members including our MP Bim Afolami and his wife. Membership now stands at 331.

Whilst most members live in and around Hitchin, we have a number from further afield in Devon, Herefordshire, Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire, Surrey, Sussex, Yorkshire, and West Wales.

Membership is drawn from all age groups and events are enthusiastically supported.

Trevor Groom

Former Membership Secretary.

## MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL 2024

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 2024.

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

Please either:

- (a) help us avoid bank charges, and pay by bank transfer, as set out on the form, and email to me to let me know you have done so. Your 2024 Membership Card and Visits Booking Form will be posted to you or
- (b) complete the enclosed renewal form and send it with payment and a stamped addressed envelope for receipt of your 2024 Membership Card and Visits Booking Form.

Yours sincerely,

Membership Secretary



## HERTFORDSHIRE ASSOCIATION FOR LOCAL HISTORY

Registered Charity No. 280499. [www.halh.org.uk](http://www.halh.org.uk)

We are pleased to let you know that our 2024 online winter lecture series starts in January, two further lectures will follow in February and March.

The lectures are free and take place online via Zoom. Each lecture will need to be booked separately, see website which contains the (rather long) link to Eventbrite. Please note, we do not record our online lectures.

Sheila White

Joint secretary

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## NEXT YEAR'S PROGRAMME

**The 2024 Programme** appears on pages 5 and 6 of this *Newsletter*. In response to a number of requests we are experimenting with a monthly meeting in June. This poses a challenge because of the lack of black-out facilities at Church House. Our speaker, Heather Falvey, has kindly offered to structure her presentation in a way that utilises any illustrations towards its end. We shall see how we get on – perhaps June will be gloomy.... If anyone has any questions concerning what is planned for next year, please let David Howlett know.

## MEETINGS 2024

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

25 JANUARY	<u>FREDERICK LANDSEER GRIGGS: HITCHIN ARTIST AND ENGRAVER</u> - an illustrated talk by James Willis
22 FEBRUARY	<u>HERTFORDSHIRE AND THE SLAVE TRADE</u> – an illustrated talk by Sarah Kerrison
28 MARCH	<u>AGM AND MEMBERS' EVENING</u> - including updates on current projects
25 APRIL	<u>HITCHIN'S QUAKERS AND THEIR BURIAL GROUNDS</u> – an illustrated talk by Phil Rowe
23 MAY	<u>THE SHAW'S IN HERTFORDSHIRE</u> : the lives and friends of George Bernard and Charlotte Shaw 1904-50 – an illustrated talk by Philippa Parker
27 JUNE	<u>RICHARD III's COMMISSIONERS OF ARRAY IN HERTFORDSHIRE AND SOME HITCHIN CONNECTIONS</u> – an illustrated talk by Dr Heather Falvey
26 SEPTEMBER	<u>HERTFORDSHIRE'S LANDSCAPE HISTORY</u> – an illustrated talk by Dr Anne Rowe
24 OCTOBER	<u>STAINED GLASS WITH A HERTFORDSHIRE AND HITCHIN SLANT</u> – an illustrated talk by Rachel Arnold
28 NOVEMBER	<u>HOW TIMBER FRAMED BUILDINGS WORK</u> – an illustrated talk by Dr Lee Prosser

## VISITS 2024

*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>Tuesday</u> 26 March at 2.00pm	<u>HITCHIN'S HISTORY EXPLORED</u> : the Museum Local Studies Room - a visit with Alan Fleck [Limit: 8 members]
<u>Tuesday</u> 9 April at 2.00pm	<u>THE LINDLEY LIBRARY, ROYAL HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY, VINCENT SQUARE, LONDON, SW1</u> - a visit with Julia Glenn [Limit: 20 members] *
<u>Sunday</u> 28 April at 2.00pm	<u>HITCHIN CEMETERY</u> – a visit with Phil Barron [Limit: 20 members]
<u>Wednesday</u> 22 May at 2.00pm	<u>THE ROYAL COURTS OF JUSTICE, STRAND, LONDON, WC2</u> - a guided visit [Limit: 20 members] *
<u>Sunday</u> 26 May at 2.00pm	<u>HISTORIC BALDOCK</u> – a guided walk with Brendan King [Limit: 15 members]
<u>Sunday</u> 30 June at 2.00pm	<u>HITCHIN'S WORTHIES</u> : a guided walk with Andy Gibbs [Limit: 15 members]
<u>Sunday</u> 25 August at 2.00pm	<u>HITCHIN PRIORY'S OUTER PARK</u> : a guided walk with Bridget Howlett [Limit: 15 members]
<u>Saturday</u> 31 August at 2.00pm	<u>ST MARK'S CHURCH, HITCHIN</u> – a visit with Joy Hammond [Limit: 15 members]
<u>Sunday</u> 22 September at 2.00pm	<u>ROMAN PURWELL</u> : a guided walk with Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews [Limit: 20 members]
<u>Sunday</u> 29 September at 2pm	<u>SILVER STREET STROLL AND BANCROFT RECREATION GROUND</u> - a guided walk with Bridget and David Howlett [Limit: 15 members]

## SPECIAL MEETINGS 2024

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

<u>Wednesday</u> in July at 8.00pm	* <b><u>THE SCILLA DOUGLAS LECTURE</u></b> Details in the Hitchin Festival Programme
<u>Wednesday</u> in July at 8.00pm	* <b><u>THE MISS LEWIS LECTURE</u></b> Details in the Hitchin Festival Programme
<u>Thursday 5 December</u> at 7.45pm	* <b><u>CHRISTMAS MEETING</u></b> Details provided nearer the time

### HHS Committee and Contacts

<p><b>President</b>     Robert B Williams</p> <p><b>Chairman</b>    Dr Barry Arends <a href="mailto:chair@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk">chair@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk</a></p> <p><b>Secretary</b>    Pamela Skeggs <a href="mailto:secretary@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk">secretary@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk</a> <a href="mailto:newsletter@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk">newsletter@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk</a></p> <p><b>Treasurer</b>    John Skeeles <a href="mailto:treasurer@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk">treasurer@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk</a></p> <p><b>Programme</b>    *David Howlett <a href="mailto:programme@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk">programme@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk</a></p> <p><b>Journal</b>        **Simon Walker <a href="mailto:journal@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk">journal@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk</a></p> <p><b>Membership</b>   Chris Finch <a href="mailto:membership@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk">membership@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Film Archive</b>    **Sam Hallas <a href="mailto:films@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk">films@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk</a></p> <p><b>Physic Garden</b>    Dr Gerry Tidy <a href="mailto:physic@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk">physic@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk</a></p> <p><b>Librarian</b>        Debbie Burstow <a href="mailto:librarian@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk">librarian@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk</a></p> <p><b>Assistant Librarian</b> Maureen Sellers</p> <p><b>Website</b>            Phil Rowe <a href="mailto:webeditor@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk">webeditor@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk</a></p> <p><b>Publication Sales</b>    Nora Evans                               Tony Read <a href="mailto:sales@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk">sales@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk</a></p> <p><b>Distribution</b>        Vicki Lockyer <a href="mailto:distribution@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk">distribution@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk</a></p>
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\* Co-opted committee members    \*\* By standing invitation

If you have an item, you would like to submit to the Newsletter please email [newsletter@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk](mailto: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](http://www.hitchinhistoricals.org.uk)