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STALBANS AND HERTFORDSHIRE
ARCHITECTURAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SOCIETY
www.stalbanshistory.org



NEWSLETTER

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Hon. Sec: B.E. Moody, 24 Rose Walk, St Albans, Herts AL4 9AF

EDITORIAL

Regular readers will notice some differences in the look and content of this issue of the newsletter – and more changes, we hope, in the future. In the course of 2004, a number of new faces joined the Council and we have taken this opportunity to update our approach to the newsletter too, in the hope that we can provide a more interesting and wider range of reading for our members.

In common with *The Times* in the last century, we have finally agreed to remove our 'small ads' (list of lectures) from our front page and replace this with news stories. The wide availability of digital photography means it is now possible to include photos much more easily, so you should be seeing more pictures in future too.

The removal of our lecture programme to the inside is by no means a demotion – rather the contrary! We plan to give more information about the content of the lectures and the speakers, to whet your appetites. Where lectures are of particular local interest we will be aiming to include a longer summary after the event, wherever we can persuade speakers to provide one for us.

This year you will receive four issues of the newsletter instead of the previous three. The aim is to report events a little more topically. Our April issue will major on materials for the AGM in May, including the Annual Report and Accounts; in July we will report on the outcome of that AGM and introduce new Council Members. In November you will see our plans for the festive season, and in January we'll be inviting members to come forward for election to various posts on Council and showing some photos of what we've been up to in the previous year.

We are also hoping to widen the input from other local groups: the British Association for Local History, Hertfordshire Record Society, Hertfordshire Association for Local History, local museum services, the Civic Society and the University of Hertfordshire Centre for Regional and Local History.

We will also be increasing our range of book reviews and introducing you to some of the fascinating material now available on the web. Even if you do not have web access, you can explore this exciting resource at your local library, which also offers courses in 'surfing' to get you started. We will welcome your ideas for books and sites that could be included in this area.

Even moving to quarterly publication, correspondence columns are difficult to sustain, but we do welcome your input. We'd welcome letters (with the proviso that these would not necessarily be published and that those which were might be edited) and your questions about local history. As always, we welcome comments and contributions, which can all be sent to me at the address on the back page.

Dee Drinkwater

Newsletter Editor

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Stop Press

As we go to press, we hear that St Albans Council have sent a letter to all who wrote to them regarding the planning application for the Kingsbury Barn site to say that the original application has been withdrawn.

No more details at present, though we hope to have more in our next issue

SOCIETY JOBS ...

Following my appeal for volunteers in the December newsletter, I am delighted to welcome our new Clock Tower Co-ordinator, Jill Bennett (see below). We are also very pleased that Peter Jeffreys has just volunteered to take over the job of Membership Secretary; he will be nominated for election at the Annual General Meeting in May.

Our most urgent need now is for a Council Minutes Secretary. It is important that we maintain an accurate records of what the Council has decided should be done,

or not done. Some experience of word processing and access to a computer would be useful

Finally, we have not yet heard from any volunteers to serve on our Council, and help make those decisions. Brian Bending, Pat Howe and David Willacy will be completing their three-year stints and it would be good to have some 'new blood' in 2005.

Brian Moody

FROM OUR NEW CLOCK TOWER CO-ORDINATOR



The Society is looking for new volunteers to help keep our unique Clock Tower open during the summer. If you have not done this before, it is very undemanding and merely takes an hour and half of your time one weekend. It can be great fun, talking to the tourists who visit St Albans, and locals who have only just 'discovered' the Clock Tower.

'Clock Watchers' work in pairs, greeting visitors to the Clock Tower, taking the entrance money, giving out tickets and leaflets, also selling post cards etc. Most of the sessions are for one and a half hours. Ideally someone should go up the tower occasionally to check that all is well – so you get fit as a bonus! As a reward, all Clock Watchers are invited to the annual party held in March.

More regular 'Clock Watchers' are also needed to join the ranks of Weekend Organisers, who are responsible for opening and closing the Tower for 'their' weekend, and ensuring there are sufficient volunteers to cover the hours.

The Clock Tower opens from Easter to mid-September each year, and is only kept open by volunteers from SAHAAS and the Civic Society. Without us, this unique 15th century building would not be accessible to the public.

If you are interested in joining us, or would like more information, please contact the new Clock Tower Co-ordinator, Jill Bennett, 29 Cornwall Rd, St Albans; Tel/Fax 01727 867685 or e-mail: jill.bennett@waitrose.com

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Our numbers continue to increase steadily and we welcome those who have joined recently:

Mrs Mary Plackett	Sopwell Lane, St Albans
Mr & Mrs Peter Wares	Ramsbury Lane, St Albans

2005/6 LECTURE PROGRAMME

Lecture Secretary Doreen Bratby writes:

"I am currently preparing the programme of Friday lectures for 2005/6 and would welcome your suggestions for possible subjects to be included in the field of architecture, archaeology, technology and history, and the names of any speakers whom you can recommend."

Ring her on 01727 858050

ARCHITECTURAL AND LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

Three lectures took us to the end of the first half of our programme before the Christmas break. A City of London history guide of Blue Badge status spoke to us on 15th November on the History of London.

Unfortunately he appeared to have misjudged the calibre of our audience particularly when he enquired whether there were any historians amongst us! However, with the aid of the latest computer gadgets he delivered an entertaining if somewhat basic lecture on the early years of the City of London.

Two weeks later we were transported to Colchester (not literally!) to hear about the latest archaeological finds on the garrison area which is being prepared for redevelopment. A huge expanse is being explored under the direction of our lecturer, Peter Masefield. Before work could commence the land had to be evaluated and a munitions expert was employed to meet any emergencies which might arise. This was because practice trenches had occupied the site during the first world war. Consequently live ammunition is a great hazard and, so far, some 250 hand grenades have been unearthed. First digs have revealed a middle iron-age enclosure with a round house and the area was first farmed about 800 B.C. Work continues on this site and Peter intrigued us all by hinting that details of some new discovery will shortly be revealed. Further than that he would not commit himself.

Our last talk before Christmas was given by our Association's President, David Dean. The combination of the subject, St Albans Historic Landscape, and the lecturer brought a large audience for the occasion. David took us (his words) 'back to basics' and compared the growth of the town at the time of the Saxon foundation with the situation in about 1250 and then at the time of the Dissolution. He produced a fascinating picture of the town over the centuries and brought home to us all how our knowledge of the past is continually changing. Two major planks of St Albans' history have been challenged by the archaeological experts. Where exactly was the Saxon market place? Unlikely to have been where we know the Norman market was as there have been no Saxon finds on this traditional area. Secondly, the ancient fortification of Kingsbury may not have been where we thought it always had been!! Again the archaeologists have thrown doubt on past research – one possibility is that Kingsbury was on the Verulamium site. Who knows what the next 'certainty' to be exploded will be?

New Year greetings to all our supporters – look forward to seeing you in 2005.

Rob Weston

Chairman, A&LH Group

ARCHAEOLOGY GROUP REPORT

GOOD NEWS, BAD NEWS

As if responding to my hopeful, then cautionary, note in the last two Newsletters, some belated backfilling at our Amwell site resulted in a small, but definite increase in evidence for multi-period activity.

Spoil heaps have a habit of yielding significant finds. (For those not familiar with excavation, spoil heaps should consist of just the soil in which finds have been found; and extracted therefrom.) The one fragment of medieval pot found during the excavation of our last trench has now been joined by several others from the spoil, when this was being put back just before Christmas. Thus we start the new year with better reason to think that there was post-Roman activity in the vicinity of the villa.

The coming months before spring will allow time for consideration of our strategy for the site and whether it is

worth continuing there. At the same time we are following up a report of other medieval pottery finds not far distant.

In our last report I omitted to mention a visit made to the National Monuments Record photographic archive at Swindon. Aerial photographs of Cross Farm and the wider area around, dating as far back as the end of the Second World War, were perused for archaeological features. Sub-surface geology showed in many places, but not anything of the sort that we were seeking, despite looking at around 140 prints.

Roger Miles

MR TELFORD'S BYPASS

THE STORY OF VERULAM ROAD

Few new roads can have had as great an impact on St Albans as the addition of a new route heading north from the town in the 19th century. The notes below are from Ann Dean's presentation to the Society on this topic, and we are grateful to her for allowing us to reproduce an edited version so that all our readers can enjoy the benefits of her research.

10th C The road from London (Watling Street) was diverted in the late 10th century by the Abbot to pass through the town, via High Street, George Street, Romeland, Fishpool Street (using the modern names) down into St Michael's and across the meadows west to Pondyards

12th C The road from London via Barnet passed through Sopwell Lane which became a main thoroughfare to the north. Nothing changed for the next 600 hundred years

17th C After the Reformation, parishes were responsible for maintaining their highways in good repair, and parishes on the old north road began to complain about the expense involved

1663 Parliament authorised JPs to impose tolls on the traffic passing along the old north road, the revenue from which was put to keeping the road in good repair

1715 The St Albans & South Mimms Turnpike Trust was formed, being responsible for 11 miles & 374 yards of road from the Parish of S. Mimms to the parish boundary of Redbourn at Pondyards (Shafford), all part of the London to Holyhead Road. Toll gates were built on the London side of Sopwell Lane and at Pondyards to the west

1796 Construction of the New London Road by the St Albans Turnpike Trust bypassed Sopwell Lane, which still retained its toll bar for travellers going to the White Hart. Another gate was placed at the junction of the New and Old London Roads

c.1800 The main sources of income in the town at this time were from the bi-weekly market, the coaching trade and all the subsidiary trades involved. With improved roads, coaches, with more dynamic design and better springs, were becoming faster

1815 Thomas Telford was employed by the Parliamentary Commissioners to survey the road from St Albans to Pondyards. In his report he criticised the materials used by the St. Albans Trustees; they countered that it was very expensive to import the materials for constructing a good road and their budget was small. 'Flint is our only natural stone' – all other had to be imported

For St. Albans the main problem, for which there was constant criticism, was the gradient of the hill into the town from St. Michael's via Fishpool Street, Romeland and George Street into High Street. Pickford's complained that the guard, racing the mail down the hill at full gallop, knocked their van to pieces, "breaking the horse keeper's arms and collarbone"

All plans were postponed because of the Trust's outstanding debts and low finances. The Trustees blamed their surveyor for his bad management of the roads and his bookkeeping. The gentleman in question was shortly after arrested and imprisoned in Hertford Gaol for falsifying the accounts

1820 On the recommendation of Sir Henry Parnell, the Chairman of the Holyhead Road Commissioners, the St Albans Trustees appointed a new Surveyor, James McAdam son of John McAdam

1825 The St Albans Trustees were overridden by Parliament and Telford's new scheme, which would require destruction of property and expensive compensation, was adopted. A very large loan would be required from the Exchequer, which was locally unpopular. The money would then have to be handed over to the Commissioners; the Trustees and Surveyor would have no control over it or the work. Two years after completion the new road would be handed back for the Trustees to administer

The Trust, now subservient to the Commissioners, had no option but to agree. The New Road was to be cut from the Peahen through the yards/stables of the Great Red Lion and Fleur de Lys; through the garden of the Christopher Inn; across Dagnall Lane; and over the garden of the Quakers' Meeting House. It would then pass over the bottom of Gombards field and the lowest part of New England Field, keeping on the high bank of Clay Pits Close. Finally, the road would go down St. Michaels Lane and over Kingsbury Farm, continuing to meet the old road at Pondyards. A tollhouse was to be built by raising the embankment at the east of Kingsbury Lane

The Trustees requested that a cross or branch road be made from Kingsbury Corner by the Black Lion in Fishpool Street to meet the new road near the Tollgate (hence Branch Road)

The total cost was estimated, with compensation, to be £10,000. Any additional cost was to be met by the Commissioners. The cost in the end was £15,000

- 1826** The road was opened to traffic by the Commissioners on 25th March 1826. A board with a proper table of tolls was fixed near Pondyards stating that double tolls would be charged for those coming down the New Road

The St. Albans Trustees were not at all satisfied with the state of Mr. Telford's road. Their report criticised the footpaths in Verulam Street and in the branch road from Fishpool Street – bad drainage – inadequate fencing, especially in the fields called Clay Pits. So very bad that cattle droves had to go via the Gorham Block as they were wandering over the property along the new road

Once fences had been repaired, the old road via Gorhambury was stopped up and travellers were encouraged to use the New Road by discontinuing tolls for a short time. The Earl of Verulam offered to take the old road from Pondyards to the Hemel Road into his estate, putting the part from Pondyards to the Gorman Block under the plough. The remainder he wished to use as a drive to his house

- 1829** The new Verulam Road passed into the hands of the St. Albans Trustees and immediately James McAdam and his father did a survey: a damning report on the construction, drainage, fences and hedges. The Commissioners refuted the allegations but did agree that because of the distance and expense of obtaining suitable materials (!!) it was not up to Mr. Telford's usual standard
- 1831** A letter received from the Dunchurch Turnpike Trust asked for support from the St. Albans Trust in opposing the proposed construction of the London to Birmingham Railway. This was rejected by the St. Albans Trustees, who didn't think it would happen! However, the Trustees soon realised that, if the railway was built, the income from tolls would be drastically reduced
- 1837** By now the road from London to Liverpool had improved travel greatly, with coaches reaching up to 10 miles an hour, but the onset of winter snow underlined the advantages of rail travel
- 1838** A year later, disaster struck the economic life of St. Albans, with the passing of the London to Birmingham Railway through Watford. The income from the tolls was not enough to pay

even the interest on the Government loan

- 1858** A branch line from Watford to St. Albans was opened. Yet another blow was dealt when the St Albans branch of the Great Northern Railway, opened in 1865. Three years later the Midland Railway passed through the town
- 1871** The loan for Verulam Road was finally paid
- 1873** The oldest and longest lived Turnpike Trust was wound up

THOMAS TELFORD 1757-1834



Thomas Telford, the son of a shepherd, was born in Scotland in 1757. Aged 14 he was apprenticed to a stonemason. He worked for a time in Edinburgh and in 1792 he moved to London where he was involved in building additions to Somerset House, the greatest construction project of the day. Two years later he found work at Portsmouth dockyard.

In 1787 he became surveyor of public works for Shropshire. By this time Telford had established a good reputation as an engineer and in 1790 was given the task of building a bridge over the River Severn at Montford. This was followed by a canal that linked the ironworks and collieries of Wrexham with Chester and Shrewsbury. This involved building the Pontcysyllte aqueduct over the River Dee.

During his life Telford built more than 1,000 miles of road. In 1811 he presented to Parliament his plan to refurbish the London to Holyhead Road and improve communications between the capital and Ireland. Telford's hand was everywhere in the building of what is today the A5. He even designed the milestones and the toll houses along the route, and such was his care in the design that today's modern cars and lorries are able to negotiate much the same route and speeds four or five times faster than the mail coaches he designed it for.

He died in London aged 77 and was buried in Westminster Abbey. As an engineer he had made a huge and lasting impression on his native Scotland, and far beyond. His influence is really felt through the enormous number of roads, bridges, harbours and churches he left behind him, many of which still stand today, 200 years later. And in Shropshire the town of Telford is named in his memory.

NEW YEAR PARTY 2005

We have become accustomed to fun parties, year after year by courtesy of Hon Secretary Brian Moody's careful organisation and also, more recently, Doreen Bratby's catering coordination. This year's 'do' was no exception to the rule and Verulamium Museum was as full as ever, with our members socialising, a glass of Brodrick's brew in hand, in a way that is less possible at or after lecture meetings.

Collaboration on the two quizzes encouraged much discussion and conversation, but despite great efforts, both Gene Peyton-Jones' picture quiz and Chris Green's 'identify the unusual object' competition defeated most of us. A stalwart few excelled themselves and produced a result - we rest amazing at their knowledge and the strangeness of some of the objects. I was pleased to recognise the plastic ball which used to hold my ball of knitting wool in the fifties



and sixties! Some considered the differences between Albert in London and Walter Scott in Edinburgh, (in terms of their memorials, that is). It was all very good fun and a very social occasion.

Thanks are due to all those who put in the effort to make it so and we now all feel refreshed and excited in moving into the Society's 2005 programme.

Kate Morris



THIS SEASON'S LECTURES

FRIDAY 28TH JANUARY

Child employment in 19th century Herts in perspective: varieties of childhood
Prof Nigel Goose

Professor Goose is Professor of Social and Economic History at the University of Hertfordshire, and Director of its Centre for Regional and Local History. He has published widely in the fields of urban, economic and social and demographic history from the 16th to the 19th centuries. His lecture will cover child employment prospects in 19th century Hertfordshire, when child labour was more prevalent in the home than in factories or mines.

TUESDAY 1ST FEBRUARY

Cremation burials at Turners Hall Farm, Wheathampstead
Simon West

Simon West from Verulamium Museum talks about the recent digs on this Hertfordshire site

TUESDAY 8TH FEBRUARY

Lord Rothschild and the Tring Museum
Teresa Wild

The Walter Rothschild Zoological Museum has been part of the Natural History Museum since 1937. but was formerly the private museum of Lionel Walter, 2nd Baron Rothschild, who moved with his family to Tring Park in 1872. Teresa Wild is its Curator

TUESDAY 15TH FEBRUARY

Mortared, plastered and rendered – lime's role in historic buildings
Jeremy Ingham

Jeremy Ingham is with a local firm of consulting engineers to the construction and building industries. A geologist by training, he investigates and advises on stone and masonry materials in new and historic buildings

FRIDAY 25TH FEBRUARY

Ancient technology
John Brodrick

As former President of SAHAAS, John will be well known to our audience. The Romans are famous for two things – their largely invincible armies and their application of technology to every aspect of life. However, they drew on a heritage of science and technology from Egypt, Syria, Greece and Etruria – not to mention China and India. He will give a sketch of ancient technology in many fields and discuss why the Romans did not achieve an Industrial Revolution 1500 years before Britain did.

TUESDAY 1ST MARCH

The lost inns of the High Street, Hemel Hempstead
Elizabeth Buteux

The Chairman of the Hemel Hempstead Local History and Museum Society

TUESDAY 8TH MARCH

Labelled heads: portraits on coins and medals
Richard Abdey
British Museum Department of Pre-history

FRIDAY 18TH MARCH

Britons in early post-Roman Hertfordshire: the placename evidence
Dr John Baker

Suggestions that a British community survived in parts of Hertfordshire and neighbouring counties through the fifth and sixth centuries are not new, but the evidence is not conclusive. Dr Baker will discuss the toponymic evidence from the area, the significance of place-names that preserve early elements, and questions of cultural survival and change. A part-time lecturer in medieval history at Birkbeck College, Dr Baker also teaches at the University of Leicester. He has published work on place-names and has research interests in Anglo-Saxon settlement. His book *Cultural Transition in the Chilterns and Essex Region, 350AD to 650AD* is due to be published by the University of Hertfordshire Press in 2005.

TUESDAY 22ND MARCH

How St Albans has changed and developed: who did what and where
Kate Morris et al.

TUESDAY 5TH APRIL

History of Redbourn
Alan Featherstone

TUESDAY 19TH APRIL

Archaeology and Local History Group AGM
Our evolving view of the Romans
John Brodrick

FRIDAY 29TH APRIL

The strange story of the Metropolitan Railway
Dr Clive Foxall

TUESDAY 10TH MAY

SAHAAS Annual General Meeting at Verulamium Museum
Verlamio-Verlamium
Simon West

TUESDAY 17TH MAY

Our past: treasure finds from England and Wales
Richard Hobbs

FRIDAY 27TH MAY

Indian influences on 18th century English gardens
Kate Harwood

Tuesday meetings are held at St Albans School and start at 8.00 p.m.

Friday meetings are at the College of Law, Hatfield Road, and start at 7.45 p.m.

They are open to all members of the Society. Non-members may attend two meetings as guests.

