



# NEWSLETTER

## *Summer 2015*

Welcome to the Summer edition of the Newsletter.

Members of Rochester Civic Society called in at Hertford on their way to Hatfield House in April and were hosted by us at the Castle, also being formally received by the Deputy Mayor and taken on guided tours of the Castle and its walls. In our turn, we enjoyed a rousing welcome on our arrival in Rochester for our annual outing in May, as you will see on p6.

Annette Robinson and Terry Betts have been working hard to get our membership database up to date. We have also been able to claim useful sums of money through Gift Aid on subscriptions (see the Treasurer's Report to the AGM in the previous Newsletter). If you have not already Gift Aided your subscription and think that you may be able to do so, or have any other queries about your membership, please contact Annette (details p5).

There has been little movement on the District Plan recently due to the local elections in May. Mike Carver, who had served as Chairman of the Panel, did not stand for re-election and this position is now occupied by Linda Haysey. The complexity of the task and the difficulty in meeting the housing requirements are putting many local Councils in the South-East under pressure in producing their Plans, but we hope to see some progress soon.

Geoffrey Thornton retired from the Committee at the AGM after many years of service, including a stint as Chairman of the Society. He was also Treasurer and a member of the Planning Sub-Committee for several years, keeper of wine stocks, a supporter of the long process of selection, design, choice, manufacture and delivery of the Salisbury Square fountain, which was stored in his garden for many months, and he led the ceremony to donate it to the Town on 11 December 1994. He was also very involved in the writing and publication of several Town guides published by the Society.

We thank him for his tremendous and greatly valued efforts. He and Fay very kindly hosted our recent Garden Party, as they have done many times before, and this will be reported in the next Newsletter.

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**PROGRAMME**

*Hertford and its landscape: a look at the development of the town with particular reference to maps, plans and illustrations from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries*

*Lecture, Wednesday 18 November 2015*

Our final speaker is Anne Rowe, well known locally as President of the East Herts Archaeological Society. Anne is also a widely-published author on local landscapes, and is familiar to some of you as a lively WEA lecturer. While her talk has a historical theme, it also carries extra resonances at a time when East Herts Council is updating its plans for the district.

The venue is as usual the church hall in St John's Street, at the normal hour of 8.00pm, preceded by teas, coffees and biscuits from around 7.45pm.

Malcolm Ramsay

**PLANNING MATTERS**

*Proposed Waitrose at Van Hage:*

The proposal for a Waitrose supermarket at Van Hage's flies in the face of national and local planning policies to protect the Green Belt and to maintain the prosperity of town centres by concentrating shopping in them. The officers' very comprehensive report to the Council's Development Management Committee made this abundantly clear and also highlighted the adverse consequences for both Hertford and Ware if more retail trade is drawn away from the towns. Yet the Committee rejected the officers' recommendation and decided to grant permission.

For some years a formal Direction has been in force under the Town and Country Planning Acts, which requires Councils to notify the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if they intend to grant permission for schemes which go against key Government policies. The Secretary of State then has the power to take the application out of the hands of the local authority and decide it himself.

Van Hage's application will be notified to the Secretary of State under the Direction although at the time of writing this had not yet been done because the conditions and obligations to be attached to the

permission had not been finalised. We have written to the Minister urging him to ‘call in’ the application for his own decision, and others have done the same – you have probably read in the *Mercury* about the petition organised by Town Councillor Jane Sartin. If the application is called in there will be a public inquiry, as there was when the Council granted permission for Sainsbury’s. Then the Society and others who are against the proposal will need to persuade an Inspector to recommend that permission be refused.

### *Artificial Turf Pitch, Richard Hale School:*

This proposal for an artificial floodlit pitch, to be available for use by local sports groups throughout the evening and at weekends, was submitted about a year ago. It aroused a lot of opposition from those living nearby, and after representations from the Society and others the planning officers made it clear that they would not recommend approval unless the scheme were amended to protect neighbours from noise and light pollution. The application has since been revised several times and finally reached the Development Management Committee for decision in June. Officers recommended approval of the latest revised scheme, and after a lengthy debate the Committee granted permission.

One aspect of the meeting was slightly disturbing. Opponents of the proposal claimed that the materials used for artificial pitches create toxic – even carcinogenic – dust which is hazardous to the health of those living nearby; some research carried out in the United States was cited. Whether or not there is anything in these claims we don’t know, but they were not rebutted, or indeed addressed at all, by the Planning or Environmental Health Officers. In response to a Member, the Planning Officer expressed the view that the question was not one which the Committee should consider at all, because the safety of materials used is not a

planning matter and is subject to control in other ways. The safety of the pitch for those using it may well be a matter between them (or their parents) and the school but, if it is alleged that the materials may cause pollution harmful to the public at large, that is surely something to be at least considered as part of the planning process.

Peter Norman

For the Planning Subcommittee

## PREVIOUS TALKS TO MEMBERS

### Looking after an Old Master

After the AGM, David Kirby treated us to an intriguing true life story of detection in high art. On buying an old coach house in 1964, he found himself in possession of a most unfashionable oil painting of two figures in dark, swirling colours in very poor condition. Numerous times it almost went on the bonfire, but there was something about its quality that piqued his interest. A chance finding of a reference book in Italy gave the first clue; it seemed to match a description of a painting by the C17 artist Salvator Rosa depicting the philosopher Xenocrates resisting the advances of a courtesan. But there is more than one version in existence so was David’s painting the real thing, or just a copy? After a long and circuitous route via the Courtauld Institute and Rhode Island University, it was declared to be genuine and was sold by auction at Christie’s in 1997. It is thought to be a self-portrait of Rosa and his long-term model and mistress Lucrezia. Rosa was an early Romantic painter of dark and dramatic landscapes with brooding cliffs and castles, peopled by brigands and witches and was very popular with young English gentlemen collecting art on the C18 Grand Tour and this is probably how the painting came to be in the collection of the Earl of Bessborough, who sold it to a dealer, which is when the copies were probably made.

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**Riots, rollicking and rolling out the barrels in Hertford's pubs**

If you think there are too many coffee houses, cafes and restaurants in Hertford, try going back a century or so and see how many pubs there were then. Not so far back, every property in Maidenhead Street was a pub, a concentration for which even CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, would be hard-pressed to justify keeping every one of them open.

Just how significant pubs are to the history of Hertford was eloquently outlined in the March talk to Hertford Civic Society, *Pubs and their Place*, by Les Middlewood, vice chair of South Herts CAMRA branch. The vicissitudes of pub life over the centuries reflect the commerce, politics and social milieu of the moment. In 1900 there were 85 pubs in Hertford for just 9,000 people; today there are 25 for a population approaching 26,000 - down from one pub per hundred to one per thousand. But, as Les Middlewood revealed, such figures say little about the ups and downs of the drinks trade.

From the boom under the Danelaw and King Alfred, to the plague and mediaeval decline, by the C15 there were 1,000 various inns and alehouses. Efforts by the authorities to limit the number of alehouses failed for a lack of proper registration or licensing. A survey of 1621 showed 25 inns, but no list of alehouses. Soon there was a swathe of inns from the present-day site of Parliament Square to Fore Street and beyond. The Salisbury is the last remaining of the big inns, typically with galleries leading to bedrooms. "It still has 30 beds and is a major hostelry - an architectural gem," said Les.

By the C17, Hertford was a major coaching stop from London to the North - with an insatiable thirst. Keepers of big inns opened adjoining small bars for traders and coachmen and had considerable hotel accommodation, including the White Swan - now the newsagents near Marshalls; the Dimsdale (formerly named the Duncombe after a local politician); the Talbot Arms and the Queen's Head - the recently closed picture-framing shop whose owners are now seeking planning permission to restore it as "a drinking establishment".

There were pubs for every trade, Les said. "On to the Ram, (it's now the Dog and Whistle) you still see the ram in plaster work. You can see the words 'Cattle Market' above it. This was the pub where people drank while buying and selling."

Pubs came into their own at election times - and not in a good way. At elections following the 1832 Reform Act everyone came to town and candidates bribed everyone with beer. The town was swollen

with people from Welwyn; there were riots in Fore Street - one lot in the Salisbury, others at the Dimsdale. It reached a peak when the landlord of the Ram fired his gun and was charged with attempted murder.

An unintended consequence of the 1830 Beer Act - aimed at stemming excessive gin consumption caricatured in Hogarth's Gin Lane prints - saw a proliferation of beer houses as anyone could open doors for a two-guinea licence; 42,000 pubs and 24,000 beer houses opened nationally. Further legislation for a century tried and failed to close them. Brewers created tied houses - a precursor of today's PubCo ownership - and Hertford saw the rise of Nicholls (owning the White Horse, Two Brewers, Warren House and the Oddfellows Arms in West Street), Baker Brewery and McMullen.

The railways added to the renaissance - including the Great Eastern, Dolphin and Sele Arms - while slum clearance brought something of a decline in numbers. "Things were so bad in Bircherley Green that slum clearance was necessary. There were five pubs in Bircherley Green alone; in the whole area of Railway Street and the covered market we had an 'enormous pub city' with a pub at every corner." Styles of pubs changed, for example, the Lord Haig, constructed for McMullen's in the mock Tudor, more family friendly, style of pubs after WWI.

The end of the C19 saw an upsurge in the Temperance movement which would further spur new women-friendly family pubs of "moderation" as a counter to male drinking dens. It became easier to revoke licences, though most were not affected in Hertford until the latter part of WWI when 15 were lost in a very short time. "But it spurred the idea of new pubs," said Les. An example is the Bridge House, now closed, with a bowling green, saloon bar and toilets.

His talk was a journey past long-lost pubs and some vanished names such as the Punch Bowl, the Flower Pot (now Greggs) and many Green Dragons, White Horses and Black Horses. The wall of the last Green Dragon, one of Hertford's oldest names, which closed in 1950, can still be seen. Coffee houses morphed into pubs just as now pubs become wine bars. But the reminders of past Hertford pubs are everywhere in street names: Maidenhead Street, Bull Plain, Globe Court in Bengo, Albion Close and many more. He concluded with an overview of the continuing tensions and conflicting desires to close or retain pubs, the planning loopholes that help turn pubs into supermarkets and the recent acceptance of CAMRA as an official body to apply for pubs to be classified as Assets of Community Value (ACV).

Ian Nash

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### VISIT TO ROCHESTER

Rochester may not have a mayor but it is not short of pageantry and we were welcomed on our arrival by a splendid town crier, complete with costume, bell and scroll, to greet us in rhyme. We were then taken on guided tours by members of the City of Rochester Society around some of the remarkable variety of buildings, all within a very walk-able space.



The city was founded by the Romans at the lowest bridging point on the R. Medway. Their bridge lasted well into the medieval period, with local landowners and parishes each being responsible for a section of its upkeep. But by the late C14 it needed substantial reconstruction, a task beyond this unwieldy management system, and two local notables, Sir John Cobham and Sir Robert Knowles, petitioned Richard II for a new type of administration, which, with adaptations, has lasted until the present day - Rochester has the only private bridge supporting a major road in the country.

Under the 1399 settlement (amended in the C16), householders elected wardens to keep the bridge in repair, using income from property they were allowed to acquire for that purpose. The present-day Rochester Bridge Trust is a registered charity, which also supports educational causes. In 1908 the local authority was empowered to appoint half the wardens with the other half being appointed by the charity. It meets in the

chapel which Sir John Cobham and Sir Robert Knowles built for travellers to pray for a safe journey, although since the Reformation it had been used as a storehouse and needed considerable restoration by the 1930s.

The bridge was built on eleven arches slightly upstream from the Roman one and lasted until the mid-C19, despite creating an awkward dog-leg in the road layout and causing some silting up of the river. Since then, change has been more rapid; an 1850s' bridge designed by Sir William Cubitt had to be altered in 1914 because the arches were too low for river traffic and a second road bridge built on the piers of the old railway bridge was opened in the 1960s. <http://www.rbt.org.uk/index.htm>

The castle was built by the Normans and has the tallest keep in England. It was besieged by King John in his dispute with the barons and the damage done by his attempts to undermine the keep can be seen to this day since the repairs rounded off one corner of an otherwise square keep. James I sold it into private hands to replenish government coffers, and it came into the



public domain in the C19 when the Earl of Jersey sold it to the local council. Already seriously damaged by fire, it had become neglected and overgrown, but the council cleared much of the grounds for gardens and festivals and today it is cared for by Historic England (previously English Heritage). <https://www.historicengland.org.uk/>

Just outside the castle is a tree believed to mark the position of the 'pie powder court' where market traders could have disputes settled; the name is said to derive from the Norman French 'pied poudre', or dusty feet, that marked traders coming straight off the street.

The magnificent cathedral was established by Bishop Justus in 604, following the mission of St Augustine, to convert the heathens of west Kent to Christianity. A major expansion programme was begun by the Norman bishop Gundulf in 1080 and continued in stages until the C15th. The Victorians carried out significant reconstruction and repairs and in 2004 it acquired the first true fresco to be created in an English cathedral since the Middle Ages, a large-scale presentation on the theme of baptism by Russian iconographer Sergei Fyodorov.

<http://www.rochestercathedral.org/>

Close to the cathedral grounds is Minor Canons Row, a very pleasing terrace of C18 houses restored by the Spitalfields Historic Buildings Trust and the childhood home of Dame Sybil Thorndyke, whose father was a canon there.



Rochester has a wide range of public and domestic buildings, many reflecting its prosperity from trade and proximity to the naval dockyards at Chatham. The C17 Guildhall is now a museum full of interesting exhibits ranging from the imposing council chamber to a recreation of life in the redundant ships used as prison hulks and the chance to use some modern technology to navigate the Medway.



*Guildhall Council Chamber*

<http://www.medway.gov.uk/leisurecultureandSPORT/localhistoryandarchives/museums/guildhallmuseum.aspx>

On a much smaller scale, you can also visit the Six Poor Travellers hostel set up by Richard Watts to give a night's lodging to workmen 'on the tramp'; this operated until 1940 when the wartime Emergency Powers Act designated Rochester a Restricted Area, thus excluding itinerant workers. The Huguenot almshouses, La Providence, are still in use and were built in the 1950s after the original foundation had moved out of London; there are plans to open a heritage centre there in the near future.

<http://www.richardwatts.org.uk/>

<http://www.frenchhospital.org.uk/>

*Left - Minor Canons Row*

Charles Dickens lived in Rochester as a child and used many of its buildings as models for scenes in his novels, in particular, Restoration House (visited by Charles II on his return to England) as Miss Havisham's house in *Great Expectations*.

Eastgate House, built in the late C16 for the Clerk of Chatham Dockyard and now under restoration, was once the Dickens museum and still houses the wooden chalet he used for writing at his nearby home at Gad's Hill when he moved back to the area in later life. He almost amounts to a local industry in his own right and it is impossible to walk many yards down the High Street without encountering a business with some reference to him in its title!



*Eastgate House*

Sue Jones

Pictures: Ian Nash

## CIVIC VOICE UPDATE

The boom in credit-fuelled property values and retail is over and town centres will have to change says a Report by an alliance of nine organisations in a response to the Portas Review on the future of our High Streets.

Retail alone is not enough and town centres must become “multi-functional social centres, not simply competitors for stretched consumers”, supporting entertainment, learning, health, socialising and culture as well. Nor can we rely on local authorities to save the day as their spending is increasingly squeezed.

There is no formulaic approach to transforming a town centre, but it does have to involve many groups and interests, says the Report entitled *21<sup>st</sup> century agora: a new and better vision for town centres*. It advocates a ‘place first’ approach adapted to local strengths and needs and emphasises the necessity for good local data.

A set of case studies, including one on Hitchin market, shows how empty retail space has been used for various charitable, not-for-profit, social, cultural and business start-up activities in both towns and inner cities in different parts of the country and looks at ways of promoting activity that stimulates the local economy.

The Report was co-produced by Action for Market Towns, the Empty Shops Network, Res Publica and other local and special interest groups. You can find it on the Civic Voice website at [www.civicvoice.org.uk](http://www.civicvoice.org.uk). Go to Campaigns, Save our High Streets and click on the link to the Report.

Sue Jones