



NEWSLETTER

Winter 2015-16

Welcome to the Winter edition of the Newsletter.

With the New Year we have a new Programme with a wide variety of talks, visits and celebrations so please get out your diaries and make a note of the dates. We are grateful to Malcolm Ramsay for all the hard work he has put into making these arrangements.

Our membership secretary Annette Robinson has also made great efforts in updating our membership records and this is the time of year when subscriptions are due. Please read the notice below carefully and decide whether you need to take any action.

2016 will be an important year for planning. There is great pressure to build more houses in the south-east and local councils are required to produce District Plans to accommodate this. But it is a complex process and the Government is considering ways to speed it up, which could have significant implications for some areas. Peter Norman and Terry Betts have laid out the problems East Herts will be facing this year and how Hertford may be affected.

We wish all our members a happy and prosperous New Year and look forward to seeing you at our meetings and events. Our venue for meetings is the Catholic Church Hall in St John's Street.

2016 Subscriptions were due on 1st January

You will find the rates on the enclosed Membership Form. The majority of members pay by Standing Order. If you are not amongst these it would help us if you were to fill in the Standing Order section of the form and send it to the Membership Secretary at 11 Norman Avenue, Bishop's Stortford, Herts CM23 4HL. If you do wish to continue paying by cash or cheque please send your subscription immediately to the same address.

Each year we reclaim a considerable sum in Gift Aid. If you are unsure whether you have already authorised this for your subscription please fill in this section of the form.

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PROGRAMME 2016

Hertford and Hatfield: linkages and associations, past, present and future - Lecture, 27 January 2016

Anthony Downs, Director of Planning at Hatfield House, who acts on behalf of the Gascoyne-Cecil family, is supportive of local campaigners concerned about draft plans for the Welwyn Hatfield area. Starting with the historic links between Hertford and Hatfield House, he will then focus on innovative plans for a 'green corridor' running parallel to the A414, on its northern side, which could help foster movement by wildlife, pedestrians and cyclists, even as development pressures threaten to worsen an already-endangered landscape. The concept of this 'green corridor' is a Hatfield House initiative.

Brickendonbury as the school for saboteurs in WW2 Lecture, 2 March 2016.

Bernard O'Connor is the author of a number of books about secret operations in the Second World War, including one specifically about Brickendonbury Manor, *Churchill's School for Saboteurs*. Based on Guy Burgess's idea of a Guy Fawkes College, Britain's Secret Intelligence Service had Brickendonbury (just outside Hertford) requisitioned to train British and foreign personnel in sabotage techniques. Who wrote the curriculum? Burgess's friend Kim Philby. Taken over by SOE (Special Operations Executive) in 1940, it specialised in training saboteurs for missions across occupied Europe.

AGM: to be followed by a lecture - Hertford Conservation Area Appraisal. 20 April 2016

John Bosworth is a conservation specialist working for East Herts Council, whose current responsibilities include various Conservation Area Reviews. He will talk about conservation policies in East Herts, focusing on Hertford in particular. This lecture should be of great interest to anyone who cherishes Hertford.

Local outing to Haileybury for 'trench trail', with guided tour of WW1 replica trench and other memorial items, with refreshment afterwards. - 18 May 2016

Your events organiser has tried out this 'trench trail' which Haileybury College has been running for interested members of the public on an occasional basis, and for numerous local

schools. It is a very moving experience, extremely well presented, replete with case studies focusing on individuals, families, sports teams and year groups torn apart by the First World War. One highlight is the replica trench, constructed under the direction of an expert military historian, and complete with a couple of 'dugouts'. But there are plenty of other features and memorials, in addition to the trench.

The arrangements for this event are necessarily different from our normal ones. The tour will start at 2.00 pm, and will last for around 2 hours, with additional time for a cup of tea. On arrival, park as for the swimming pool/gym, and we will meet in front of it. There is no fee for Civic Society members (non-members £4 if numbers permit), but anyone who registers with Malcolm Ramsay and does not turn up would be denying someone else the opportunity to take part, as numbers are limited to 25 and no repeat event is planned.

Visit to Chatham Historic Dockyard, 8 June 2016

Chatham Dockyard was the place more often suggested than anywhere else by those who came on our recent visits to Faversham and Rochester. It is completely fascinating, as I can report after a recent visit. First, it is well suited to group/coach experience; our visit will start with a preliminary guided tour, making use of our coach. There is something for everyone: not just docks but three ships to explore, including one built like the 'Cutty Sark' and also two more modern warships (a destroyer and a submarine), an historic garden, a working brewery (good beer), and the Ropewalk where we will get an additional guided tour and demonstration of rope making presented with great panache by a woman in period costume (the Ropewalk was the main sphere for women's work in late C19 Chatham docks, and was once the longest building in the country). There is a nice place to eat and drink, near the garden. Shortly before our visit, Chatham will unveil its own

counterpart to the 'Mary Rose': an C18 warship ('Namur') reconstructed from parts used in its own dock buildings.

The cost this year works out at £32.50 (or £65 for two people, which is more expensive than for last year, but this very much reflects the entrance charge for the Dockyard (even with the appreciably cheaper group rate). And we will still travel in great comfort, in an executive coach complete with all comforts including air conditioning and loo. Tickets will be available from Peter and Susan Brown's shop from early May or, more immediately, from Malcolm Ramsay, whose contact details are given elsewhere in this newsletter (see p6). Last year's trip was a sell-out, so don't leave it until the last moment.

Civic Society Awards Ceremony 14 September 2016

2016 sees Hertford Civic Society running the competition for awards for good architecture in the town, for the first time in four years, and this process is always something to celebrate at its conclusion. To mark the culmination of the awards process, there will be speeches and refreshments at Hertford Castle. Tickets will be available from Peter and Susan Brown's shop in St Andrew St from mid August or from committee members including Terry Betts, Richard Threlfall and Malcolm Ramsay. Doors open at 7.00pm, speeches at 8.00pm.

Affordable Housing Lecture, 9 November 2016

Jackie Trundell of Riversmead, one of the largest providers of affordable housing in East Herts, will explain what this kind of housing actually involves. What does it look like? How much of it currently exists? How do eligible people access it? In addition she will talk briefly about the current and future work of Riversmead.

While this programme is mainly in the early and middle part of 2016, it will still be possible to add another event later in the year, if there is a need to hear about and discuss aspects of the draft District Plan, due to be concluded early in 2017. We had a lively and constructive autumn meeting in 2015, about consultancy plans for Hertford, which was added to the programme only a few weeks ahead of the event. To inform members, we used email (for those whose addresses we know) and flyers in the library and other such places. We still got a good audience.

One last point: the next garden party is likely to be in 2017.

Malcolm Ramsay

PLANNING MATTERS

We have not commented on any new planning applications since the last Newsletter. Here is an update about some proposals we commented on earlier.

Newsagent's kiosk at East Station:

The children's nursery which uses part of the station building applied to increase the size of one of their rooms by absorbing space used by a newsagent's kiosk. We objected to the loss of the newsagent's, which is an amenity one could reasonably expect to find at a station. It turned out that in fact the proposed change would only affect a vacant store room, and the application was approved. The kiosk no longer operates as a newsagent's.

Ware Park:

We objected to a proposal to replace a run-down barn in a wood yard in Ware Park with a large five-bedroomed house. The site is in the Green Belt. Happily the application was refused by officers under delegated powers, largely on Green Belt grounds.

Hertford Golf Course

Last year we objected to an application for substantial land-raising at the site on London Road, Hertford Heath, which has permission for a golf course, and that proposal was refused by the County Council. A revised application for less substantial earthworks is currently under consideration. The new proposals would create ponds enabling the course to be irrigated in dry weather without taking water from any stream or from the mains.

Given that there is permission for a golf course on the land, that the permission has been partly implemented, and that the latest scheme involves bringing into the site less material than previously proposed, we considered that no purpose would be served by further delay in completing the course and therefore have not objected to the proposal.

Peter Norman

What's happened to the District Plan?

Early in 2014 the Council published a draft version of the new District Plan. They held a public consultation between February and May of that year, and the Society made a comprehensive set of comments. Almost two years have passed and, although the Council have responded to comments on some of the detailed design and environmental policies, they appear to have made no progress on the really important issues: critical questions like how many new homes should be built, where they should go, whether parts of the Green Belt should be built on, and how new roads and schools can be provided to serve the developments. On these issues the Council have neither accepted nor rebutted the criticisms which we and others made, and have not revised the Plan in response to them. The whole process seems to have ground to a halt.

Meantime house builders are anxious to meet the demand for new homes in the District and have been making planning applications, particularly in places like Buntingford and Braughing which are not protected by the Green Belt. The Government have made it clear, in the *National Planning Policy Framework*, that where there is no up-to-date Plan in force such applications should be approved. This means that development is being permitted in a piecemeal, uncoordinated way, but still not on a scale sufficient to meet the needs.

This situation is not unique to East Herts, and the Government – increasingly frustrated by the failure of Councils to finalise their Plans so that more houses can be built – are now putting a Bill through Parliament which will allow the Secretary of State to take away plan-making powers from Councils who fail to produce a Plan, and do it for them. This of course would make it even less likely that the views of local people would be taken into account. But are the Council to blame for the delay? The District Plan Executive Panel, made up of Cllrs Linda Haysey, Eric Buckmaster and Gary Jones, have been meeting regularly, and a lot of work has been going on behind the scenes. Three reports recently presented to the Panel reveal just how difficult it is going to be to put a sound Plan together. (All draft Plans have to be examined by an independent Inspector, and Councils cannot adopt a Plan unless the Inspector finds it to be ‘sound’).

The first of the reports, a review of the Green Belt, shows that almost every part of the Green Belt in East Herts, including those areas allocated for major development in the 2014 draft Plan, plays a valuable role in checking urban sprawl, keeping towns separate or safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. Those are the reasons for which the Green Belt exists. In the *National Planning Policy Framework* the Government have

re-emphasised their continued support for Green Belts. As over half of East Herts is outside the Green Belt, the Council may well find it difficult to persuade an Inspector that putting almost all proposed new development on land which performs a valuable role as part of the Green Belt is a sound approach.

The second report is about the A414 road, which runs from Hatfield through Hertford to Harlow and beyond. As we all know, the parts of this road leading to and through Hertford are already subject to severe congestion at certain times of day. Looking at the effects of traffic from the various areas proposed for house building in the draft Plan, the report concludes that the road could only cope with the development proposed to take place during the first five years. After that, the Highway Authority would resist further developments unless there were ‘a strategic intervention for the A414 through Hertford’. In plain English, that means a southern by-pass connecting the Rush Green Link with the Cole Green by-pass. Such a new road would of course have a serious effect on the countryside, and no financial provision has been made for what would be a very expensive project. Among the proposals scheduled for the period beyond the first five years are the strategic sites on the edge of Welwyn Garden City (1,700 homes) and north and east of Ware (2,000 to 3,000 homes). These are key components of the Plan, but could not be delivered in the absence of a major and uncostered improvement to the A414.

The third report gives the results of a study of whether the major residential developments included in the draft Plan, and all the infrastructure such as roads, schools, parks and health facilities on which they depend, could realistically be delivered within the Plan period. In years gone by, building firms used to build houses and the cost of providing facilities to serve them fell largely on local councils and the Treasury. Now, developers are required through legal agreements to make substantial

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contributions not only to infrastructure but also to the provision of affordable housing (for example by transferring some of the properties they build to a housing association at less than market value). But if local authorities demand too much by way of infrastructure contributions and affordable housing, a scheme becomes unviable – the developer simply won't build it because there's not enough profit in it for him. The critical finding of the study was that it is doubtful whether the proposed development of between 5,000 and 10,000 homes in the Gilston area north of Harlow could pay for both infrastructure and the required proportion of affordable housing. The Gilston scheme, by virtue of its size, is such an important element of the Plan that, if it were found not to be deliverable, the Plan could not be adopted.

In preparing its District Plan the Council have got to square at least three circles: (i) meet the need/demand for housing and at the same time protect the Green Belt; (ii) bring forward now a supply of land sufficient to accommodate five years' worth of house-building, and make strategic plans, in co-operation with neighbouring authorities, for the two decades beyond that; and (iii) ensure that all the roads and other infrastructure will be there when needed, even though the funding and provision of that infrastructure is the responsibility of other bodies, some of whom plan ahead on only a very short timescale.

Squaring one circle is difficult. Squaring three or four at the same time is impossible. When former Councillor Mike Carver stood down from the Council last May, after several years in the hot seat trying to drive the District Plan process forward, he began to lobby his political colleagues in Government about the problems faced, not only by East Herts, but by councils all over the south-east where development pressures are strong. He discussed frankly with some of us in the Society the dilemmas which the Council faced (and still faces), and a meeting was convened of representatives of a large number of civic and similar societies from all over Hertfordshire. With help too from the Association of North Thames Amenity Societies, letters have been written to local MPs, and a detailed submission (put together with the help of members of this and several other civic societies) was made by Mike Carver to an expert panel set up by the Planning Minister to consider how the District Plan process could be improved. A variety of seemingly minor changes could help, such as allowing a Plan to be prepared and approved in stages rather than all at once, or a Plan being approved in part only, or approved for a limited period pending review. The present process has been compared to working on a field of study for several years and then having to write a single

exam paper in one go – with the pass mark at 100%! We wait to see what the expert panel comes up with.

Terry Betts and Peter Norman

PREVIOUS TALKS TO MEMBERS

Hertford and its Landscape

There was a full house at the church hall in St John's Street on 18 November for Anne Rowe's talk entitled 'Hertford and its Landscape'. Anne is a local author, and President of East Herts Archaeological Society. She has recently been making a detailed study of an engraving of Hertford as seen from Port Hill, dating from 1700, but first she showed us a relief map illustrating how the forerunner of the River Thames ran in the broad vale from Watford, through what is now Hertford, and on to the sea via Essex. This vale was blocked by a glacier during the Ice Age, diverting the Thames away from Hertford on to its present more southerly course.

Forward a few thousand years to the tenth century AD and we find two 'burghs' (military settlements) recorded at Hertford in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, one on either side of the river at Old Cross and Fore Street respectively. Anne then took us to two late sixteenth-century maps of Hertfordshire, by Christopher Saxton and John Norden, both of which indicate that by then the Lea was bridged at both Hertford and Ware. Deer parks at Hertingfordbury and Ware Park feature prominently on these maps. Norden's map, from 1598, is the first to show the main roads into and out of the town, but the earliest plan of the town itself is that by John Speed dated 1616. As well as features which are familiar today, such as the castle, Old Cross and Mill Bridge, Speed's map shows Hertford's open arable fields on the sloping land to the south of the town – fields named on a later eighteenth-century map as Churchfield and Great and Little Wall Field. These arable fields were divided into strips, as were the hay meadows in the flood plain of the Lea.

And so to the engraving of Hertford as seen from Port Hill (then Poet Hill), made by Jan Drapentier in 1700 and published in the first County History by Sir Henry Chauncey. Digital enlargement has revealed prodigious detail in the drawing not easily seen in the original. Anne took us on a virtual tour of eighteenth-century Hertford by comparing the visual representation in the engraving with a map of the town by John Andrews published over half a century later in 1766. Both show that Hertford remained small and compact, with extensive gardens and orchards behind the houses in

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St Andrew Street, Castle Street and Fore Street. There was a market and a town hall on the north side of Fore Street, as well as the gaol, constructed in 1702 where the Corn Exchange now stands. Prior to 1801 those sentenced to death at the assizes held in the town hall two or three times a year were taken to Gallows Hill to be hanged, but from 1801 onwards executions took place in the town centre.

We were taken to 'the cage', where drunks were apparently locked up overnight, the bridewell and the pound for stray animals; to Bull Plain, then called Honey Lane; and of course to the castle, of which by 1766 only the curtain wall and the Tudor gatehouse remained. The gatehouse was then a private residence, and its garden included the Norman motte, on top of which the map shows an ornamental garden building! At the other end of the town Christ's Hospital School rivalled the castle in terms of size, though not of antiquity; it had been occupied since 1683 as a boarding school following the destruction of the original school in Greyfriars in London by the Great Fire of 1666. The Drapentier engraving shows 'Bluecoat Boy' statues on the northern edge of the site, suggesting that in 1700 the entrance was from that direction rather than from the south as it was later.

Finally we were shown the remains of the Priory – in 1766 in residential use as the home of Sir Thomas Dimsdale, and Bayley Hall and the Quaker meeting house were pointed out, as well as two mills in the middle of the town on The Wash; other water mills on the eastern side of the town were bypassed by a cut, presumably for barges, labelled the 'New River' (not to be confused with Sir Hugh Myddleton's New River, which started in Ware). But what was the 'Queen's Bench', near the south-west corner of St John's churchyard? Who was Mr Bray, and what was the folly which bears his name, shown where Folly Island now lies?

The lively discussion at the end of the meeting demonstrated how much those present had enjoyed Anne's entertaining and educational presentation.

Peter Norman

Summer Party

Despite the rather chilly weather, we had a very pleasant summer party at Whitacre, at the kind invitation of Geoffrey and Fay Thornton. The delightful garden reveals itself a little at a time as you climb the south-facing slope from Port Vale through a variety of planting, emerging at the top onto an elegant sloping lawn with some splendid trees. The c.1840 Grade II listed house is of an interesting design with its large veranda supported on cast iron pillars, a style said to be favoured by the British army for its hospital for officers in the West Indies.

The enthusiastic de Merck barbershop singers entertained us this year with a classic *a cappella*-style rendition of songs from the 1930s to the present day while catering was provided by Serendipity.

Ian Nash and Sue Jones



De Merck singers at Whitacre

Civic Society Awards Ceremony 2016

The purpose of the Civic Society Awards is to give recognition to those who serve well the cause of improving the environment and amenities of Hertford and thus to encourage others who are in a position to improve the town to act responsibly. Any building or its environment which has been improved, or any new building, is eligible for entry.

Members are invited to nominate candidates for consideration in the 2016 Awards process. Eligible projects should have been completed in the last five years. Please send your nominations to Richard Threlfall.

Richard Threlfall

Civic Society Blue Plaques

The Society has now received listed building consent for the five plaques we want to install in our current programme. These commemorate Stephen Austin, who established the *Hertfordshire Mercury*, John Briant, the bell-founder and clock maker, Henry Chauncey, the historian, the building of the Prince Albert cottages in Cowbridge, and Dr Thomas Dimsdale who developed inoculation against cowpox. Whilst waiting we have obtained quotations from potential suppliers. However, the Town Council has recently decided that it would like to establish a Heritage Trail in the town which would involve erecting plaques commemorating notable people and historic premises in the town together with an accompanying pamphlet. We are currently in discussion with the Council with a view to co-ordinating our two programmes.

Andrew Sangster

Friends of Panshanger Park

This is a year of change for the Country Park with new paths opened from both the west and east ends of the parkland. Walkers from Welwyn Garden may come through the valley to Keepers Cottage and from Hertford the oak tree walk takes us up the escarpment to the site of the house and orangery. More and more walkers, and their dogs, enjoy the paths spreading out from Thieves Lane car park through meadow or woods - paths tracked every Saturday morning by hundreds of runners doing the 5km Park Run. This was started in 2014 by the Friends of Panshanger Park to match the country wide organisation of Park Runs starting at 9.00 a.m. on Saturdays throughout the year, with extras on special holidays - Christmas, New Year and Easter etc. Our Park Run averages 180 people of all ages and the total distance in twelve months by the 10,000 plus in Panshanger girdles the world. The free runs are filled by men, women and children from the locality who are often joined by visitors from York, Manchester, Brighton or just Milton Keynes. Locals compare the park with runs made in Cumbria or Bristol.

Friends invited visitors to photograph the Park and received 200 views taken by children and adults on mobile phones and tablets as well as small or large cameras. The very best were selected and displayed at the Friends AGM in November. Prizes were awarded to under-16s and adults and the best 12 images displayed in a calendar - including an Osprey on migration to Africa rising with a large trout, a sighting of a rare long eared owl and the curving outline of King's Lake.

Change has also occurred in the ownership of the Park - the French connection with Lafarge has gone and new Irish owners have retained company names and staff. Thus the Friends are in discussion with the same managers for Tarmac and continuing pressure for greater areas of the

land to be made available for more visitors in wheelchairs, on foot or bicycle and even horseback. All of this is done in support of HCC and EHDC councillors and planners; the latter are now taking much delayed interest in responsibilities for the listed buildings in the Grade II* historic landscape created by the Earls Cowper and their fashionable advisors Humphrey Repton and Capability Brown.

A great deal of work still has to be done by all involved with this delightful landscape to develop an acceptable programme for the final development of the Country Park with all the forces pressing on the boundaries for housing development - Hertford to the east and Welwyn Garden to the west. Negotiations are still continuing on the planning application to spread millions of tonnes of inert material in the south west corner near to Cole Green. It is to be hoped this work will be separated from the long overdue delivery of the Country Park which the planning permission of 1982 stated should be open by 1994.

<http://friendsofpanshangerpark.co.uk/>

Richard Threlfall

Association of North Thames Amenity Societies

The Association (ANTAS) was set up in 1994 to provide a forum for amenity societies mainly in Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire and to make representations on their behalf, particularly on central government consultations. It has met twice a year since for the purpose of sharing experience and information on what does and doesn't work. Member societies have taken it in turns to host meetings and proceedings have been accompanied by talks from experts on matters of common interest.

In recent years the many government consultations have moved away from sending out weighty hard tomes to an on-line format. At the same time the move to create regional strategic planning, to which ANTAS made a significant contribution, has been abandoned. These changes have led to a diminished role for the Association although members are still keen to meet twice a year. However, it has become increasingly difficult to fill the officer posts and to find members for the Executive Committee. To resolve this dilemma, member societies were presented with a revised constitution which will require them to be responsible for setting up and running meetings.

Civic Voice made clear their concern that the Association should continue in existence. This new arrangement was subjected to a vote at the recent AGM in Amersham and was adopted by the large number of societies present without opposition. At the same time it was possible to set up a new committee to oversee arrangement of meetings. It now remains to be seen whether the new modus operandi can be made to work.

Andrew Sangster

Comprehensive Spending Review

The Heritage Alliance, representing heritage organisations across the UK, has given a cautious welcome to the recent Comprehensive Spending Review, while also expressing concerns for the future.

Although there was little direct mention of 'heritage' in the CSR, museums sports and the arts were seen as assets; Discover England will receive £40m to support tourism and £1m has been found to promote Hull City of Culture 2017 and to prepare for the next City of Culture. Funding for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and for National Parks has also been protected within DEFRA's budget.

Historic England (the public body successor to English Heritage) will be cut by 10% over the next four years but it and the Churches Conservation Trust have been given more freedom to “move towards greater financial reliance and sustainability”, (that is, to raise money from non-government sources) said Heritage Alliance, which also viewed the cut of 5% to the DCMS budget as less drastic than might have been expected.

But the Alliance did warn of threats to heritage in the future. “Other measures in the Spending Review impinge on the condition of our heritage assets, notably the pressure on Local Authorities to reduce their property portfolios. The Spending Review will allow Local Authorities to retain 100% of receipts from sales to be used for improving local services. If this results in the rapid sale of town halls, libraries and other civic buildings, the Heritage Alliance will be working to ensure that disposal policies take account of the community value of these assets to avoid these buildings, many of them historic landmark buildings on the high street, being simply sold to the highest bidder and ending up empty or on the Heritage at Risk register,” the Alliance cautioned.

Its statement went on to say that “If the receipts were ploughed back into under-resourced historic environment services the overall principle would be more acceptable. Similar conditions should apply when central government departments release £4.5 billion worth of surplus land and property assets.”

More details at <http://www.theheritagealliance.org.uk/CSR>

Heritage Counts 2015

Historic England’s latest report on the state of our heritage sites says that the vast majority of the owners of Listed Buildings recognise their importance and care for them well, albeit that this can be very expensive and they would appreciate some support, for example, in the form of VAT exemption for cost of repairs.

Volunteering is very important in raising funds and providing training in conservation. Church buildings are also more likely to be preserved when they play a significant role in community life.

There seems to be a growing interest in historic buildings with an estimated 66.7m visits in 2014. This represents a rise of nearly one third since visitor data was first collected in 1989.

The number of buildings on the At Risk register has fallen from 5,753 in 2014 to 5,478 this year. One third of those on the List in 2010 have been saved, but it is getting more expensive. “On average, it costs £501k more to repair a building on the Register than its eventual end value. The estimated difference between the amount it would cost to repair all buildings on the Register to a minimal standard, and their eventual end value has risen by £10m since 2010 to £475.4m.”

And there are concerns about the capacity of local authorities to protect historic buildings. While all types of planning applications fell during the recession, applications for Listed Building consents are now increasing, but “Despite a marginal increase in the number of Local Authority staff in the historic environment in the last year, employment remains substantially below 2006 levels - historic environment staff numbers have declined by 31% since 2006,” says the report.

More details at www.heritagecounts.org.uk

Lift Up Your Herts

I am grateful to Sheila Pettman, a previous editor of this Newsletter, for drawing to my attention an article by Paul Jennings, in a series called *Oddly Enough*, which was published in the *The Observer* on 1 September 1963 and reproduced in our Newsletter sometime during the 1970s. In the article, he draws attention to the difference between travelling north to south and east to west in Hertfordshire. The north to south route is dominated by fast, direct road and rail links, modern industry and new settlements while the east to west route is indirect and obscure and seems to take us back into a deep past.

“That middle part, Hertfordshire ... secret shut-in fields and dark little towns, that’s where Chesterton’s Secret People live, in an England older and newer than can ever be written about. The New Towns, de Havillands, jet aircraft, mysterious factories in fields, these are an advanced intellect, a final articulation, a super-ego sitting above the great id of London and subsuming it. But all those little dark villages and hedges and little low houses, those silent-bustling towns with many yards containing enormous blank high wooden buildings, are an ancient secret compared with which St Alban’s Cathedral, or the church at Tewin, (named after Tew, the Saxon god of war, like Tuesday), is as new as the jets.”

At first sight he seems to be juxtaposing the modern and pre-modern, the urban and the rural, as though they were totally different and had nothing to do with each other, but it is more complicated than that. People do not live in separate time bubbles but keep adapting as different aspects of their lives move at different paces.

On driving through Stevenage, he is struck by the bizarre sight of three workmen,

silhouetted against a brilliant red sunset, dancing on the top of a gasometer. *“I do not want to know what good fortune was the cause of their dancing - the birth of a fine boy, a pools-win or pay rise, or perhaps a sudden access of joy up there in the flaming sky, above the crawling earthbound traffic, something ‘given’, divine. But I do not think any other county could claim this. In a way you could say that a gasometer is the opposite of a dance; it is so big and serious. Dancing and gasometers can be brought together only in the surrealist country where opposites are resolved - in Hertfordshire, ultra-rural and ultra-urban, old and new, London and not-London.”*

Whimsical as his style may be, he is making a serious point about how the old and the new can come together rather than be in collision and this raises questions for our own time. Can we adapt to modern demands for housing, transport and changing work practices without steamrolling our human relationships, landscapes and heritage? Does change have to be a battle between old and new in which the old is always lost or, at best, by-passed and left as irrelevant or can there be adaptation and evolution? Paul Jennings certainly thought that the unique mix that goes to make up Hertfordshire would have something significant to offer in his own time. *“One day... - technicians in white coats, peasants with walnut-tree complexions, publicans, horsemen, tennis-players, wild Saxons, quiet deacons - will come marching down through Watford, Harrow, Willesden, ... and all will be changed,”* he wrote. *“All unobserved, they are turning the twentieth century to England’s account, they are supplying material for Trends before anyone actually starts writing about them.”*

Sue Jones