



# NEWSLETTER

## *Spring 2018*

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of the Hertford Civic Society will be held on Wednesday 25 April 2018 at 8.00pm in the Hall of the Church of the Immaculate Conception and St Joseph, St John's Street, Hertford.

### AGENDA

1. Minutes of the AGM held on 26 April 2017
2. Report of the Committee for 2017
3. Hon Treasurer's Report and Accounts
4. Election of Officers
5. Election of Members of the Committee
6. Any other business

The current Officers and Committee are listed on p6-7 of this Newsletter. All retire annually. The Constitution provides for up to sixteen Committee members in addition to four Officers. Nominations for election of Officers and Members of the Committee should be made in writing to the Vice-Chairman, Malcolm Ramsay, supported by a seconder and with the written consent of the nominee. Nominations for election as an Officer must be made at least seven days before the AGM, but nominations for election of Members of the Committee will be accepted at the meeting. **If you are attending the AGM, please bring this Newsletter, which contains the relevant papers.** Refreshments will be served before the meeting and, if time allows, between the business and the talk, followed by discussion, on local media.

### **CAN YOU HELP? ROADIES WANTED!**

You don't have to be rude, insensitive, ugly, or scruffy, but if you can connect up the components of your PC or home entertainment system, then you already have the skills we need to help set up our projector and Public Address system at the evening meetings. At present only one person knows how to do all of this. We need several other people who can do it, two for each meeting. It would mean coming early to just a few evening meetings a year, and receiving prior and on-the-job training from our expert. At the last meeting, all of the equipment worked well. This meant everyone saw the slides and heard the speaker and the questions clearly. It makes meetings more fun. So, if you can, please help the Society and volunteer to help set up the equipment - we will provide training, if necessary. Talk to John Bevan to understand better what would be involved.

## CONTENTS

**Caring for Hertford**

Planning Matters p3

**Serving our Members**

Programme p2

AGM Papers p4

**Previous Talks to Members:**

Historical Architectural Gems of Hertfordshire p11

**A Wider View**

Civic Voice Update p11

**Committee Members and Contact Details** p6-7

**PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The programme for the year was described in some detail in the last Newsletter (Winter 2017-18), so this is just a succinct update. Our next events are:

*The future of local papers/media*

AGM, then short talk and discussion by expert panel, 25 April 2018

Paul Winspear, the editor of the *Bishop's Stortford Independent*, will briefly give his views about the likely roles of old and new media in the future for towns like Hertford; this will be followed by a discussion with an expert panel, plus plenty of opportunities for the audience to take part. Come and join the debate. The panel features three local people with expertise across a range of media: Anna Schlenker, Ian Nash and Dr Mike Howarth.

*Visit to Sudbury in Suffolk*

6 June 2018

There is only one place left, although there is a waiting-list. Our visit includes both an introduction by an historian from the Sudbury Society, and a fascinating tour of a historic local brickyard where bricks are still being made by hand in the traditional way. There will also be time to do your own thing, whether visiting the shops of the equally historic silk mills or going to the museum and gallery at Gainsborough's House, the timber-framed building where the artist was born and grew up. Or there are two of England's thousand best parish churches to visit, as identified by Simon Jenkins.

The cost is the same as for last year, at £25. You can enquire about a place by contacting Malcolm Ramsay (most people now do this by email: his contact details can be found elsewhere in this Newsletter - see p6). As ever, we leave Hertford in our coach from alongside Hertford East or Tesco at 8.45am. And reckon to return by around 6.30pm at the latest.

*Summer party*

Sunday 1 July 2018, from 12.30pm

This is taking place at Roxford near Hertingfordbury, in the lovely garden of the house where the composer Haydn stayed on visits in the 1790s (our kind hosts are Linda and David Haysey). The party planners are still working on this event; tickets will be available from Terry Betts or Malcolm Ramsay, and also (from late May) Peter and Susan Brown, who have kindly agreed to go on selling tickets

even though they are not expecting still to be trading from their current shop. They will however continue to live at 40 St Andrew St, and can be phoned (01992 589880) or visited or emailed: studio@peterandsusanbrown.co.uk.

### *Blue plaques trail in central Hertford*

Wednesday 1 August 2018, starting at 7pm, Salisbury Square

This is a repeat of the twin tours led last year by Jean Riddell and Geoffrey Rice: Jean focused on the Fore Street area, and Geoffrey on St Andrew St. Those of you who have already done one option might like to return for whichever you missed last time. And others may like to sign up for the first time.

The tour(s) will start at 7.00pm, and last for around 80 or 90 minutes. We will meet near the fountain in Salisbury Square. There is no fee for Civic Society members (non-members, if numbers permit, £4), but anyone who registers and does not turn up would be denying someone else a place, as the total number is limited to around 25 people, and no further re-run is planned. To register, please contact Malcolm Ramsay by email, by phone (no ansafone) or by post: his contact details are given elsewhere in this Newsletter (see p6).

### *Recording Hertford's oral history*

Lecture, 14 November 2018

Peter Ruffles and his collaborators in the Oral History Group will delight us with tales of bygone Hertford as recorded by the Group and its volunteers. We will say a little more, closer to the time, in another Newsletter.

### *Times, venues and other events*

The two lectures (25 April and 14 November) are on Wednesdays, and start at 8.00pm, with refreshments from around 7.45pm. They take place in the hall of the Roman Catholic church in St John's Street. We may well hold another event later this year, focusing on transport

issues - any such date will be advertised by email to members and by flyers in the library and other central venues.

Malcolm Ramsay

## PLANNING MATTERS

### *Progress on Bircherley Green*

The rebuilding of Bircherley Green is clearly the biggest and most important development scheme in Hertford for many years. It is a pity that, since the Council agreed to grant planning permission in October, there has been little or no information from the developers about progress or timing, and all people have seen are more and more shops boarded up.

The permission was formally issued on 5 January, following conclusion of the planning agreement. That agreement provides, among other things, for the developers to report to the Council by 5 April on the progress of discussions with the NHS about the possibility of part of the new development being designed and used by the NHS for local GP practices. There will also be submissions from the developers about various details which the Council has to agree before work can start, such as a construction traffic management plan, a drainage strategy, and details of external lighting, noise insulation, and vents and extractors. For other recent large developments such submissions have been posted on the Council's website, where it is possible to comment. In this case no such submissions have been posted yet, although there is an application for approval of proposed signage for the hotel.

In the meantime we are seeking information about what is to happen to the Wallace memorials in the existing paving and on the wall of the former Waitrose.

### *County Minerals Plan*

Consultation on the draft Minerals Local Plan, prepared by the County Council, has now closed. The Society has long argued that Hertford has contributed more than its share to the extraction of aggregates in the County, and we were pleased to see that the new plan no longer designates any areas around the town as suitable for further quarrying. Instead a large area east of Stanstead Abbots is proposed.

However the policies in the draft plan to prohibit or restrict quarrying in undesigned areas are very much less clear and stringent than the corresponding policies in the existing plan. Moreover the existing policy which restricts quarrying when there is no proven immediate need for it is omitted from the new draft. Accordingly a representation was made asking for the policies on these matters to be strengthened.

### *District Plan Modifications*

At the time of writing, the Society's response to the consultation on Modifications to the District Plan had not been finalised, but we shall almost certainly object to the addition to the Plan at this late stage of a firm proposal for a Hertford by-pass. It may be that a by-pass will prove to be necessary, but at present the idea is listed in the County's Transport Plan as just a 'concept', and far more work needs to be done on costs and possible alternatives before it can be concluded that a by-pass is the best option.

Peter Norman

## **AGM PAPERS**

### **Minutes of the AGM held on April 26, 2017**

#### *Apologies:*

Hilary and Norman Anderson, Jane and Harold Chaplin, Peter Norman, Sally Paque, Andrew Sangster, Alison and Dick Warn

#### *Report of the Committee:*

The Chairman called for volunteers to join the Committee and took the meeting through the Report.

*Bengeo Quarry* - We are pleased that permission has been refused. Geologist Dr Bryan Lovell, who supported the campaign, advised that no quarrying should be allowed on this site because of the danger to the safety of the water supply. We now need to lobby to remove the site from the current Local Minerals Plan.

*Bircherley Green Redevelopment* - While we acknowledge that developers Wrenbridge have been very helpful in communicating with us, we are opposed to many aspects of this scheme. The application will now go before a Design Panel appointed by EHDC.

*Civic Society Awards* - This has been a highlight of the year and it is likely that more new-build sites will become available in the future.

#### *Consultations on Strategic Plans -*

*Transport (HCC)* - There are proposals for a southern by-pass, although this would not happen for many years. Levels of pollution along the A414 warrant development of a management plan as soon as possible, but little seems to be happening.

*EHDC District Plan* - We have objected to the housing numbers, but the Plan will probably pass inspection.

*Simon Balle Through-School* - Although road and pedestrian improvements were part of the conditions of permission, these only seem to be happening now, months after the new school building opened.

*Blue Plaques Heritage Trail* - We are very pleased that this project, in conjunction with Hertford Town Council and History Society, has been completed and are grateful to Andrew Sangster and his team of HCS volunteers for all the administrative work they have done.

*Links to Other Organisations* - We are pleased that a number of local councillors have joined HCS. Richard Threlfall continues his association

with Friends of Panshanger Park, as does Malcolm Ramsay with the Green Corridor Group. The East of England Group seems to have fallen into abeyance for lack of regional planning.

### Treasurer's Report:

The Treasurer took the meeting through his Report. There has been a small decrease in membership and a slight increase in expenses. Our deposit account is approximately £90,000 and decreases by about £2,000 each year, with our main expenses being repair and maintenance of the fountain. In order to improve our communications, the Treasurer reported that he has set up an experimental website more advanced than our existing one and called for help in developing this, particularly for photos of Hertford including people and suggestions for issues we could pursue, such as air quality.

### *Acceptance of the Reports:*

Proposed - Richard Threlfall, seconded - Sheila Pettman. Accepted *nem con*.

### *Election of Officers and Committee:*

Chairman - Terry Betts. Proposed - Malcolm Ramsay, seconded - John Bevan. Accepted *nem con*.

Vice-Chairman - Malcolm Ramsay. Proposed Terry Betts, seconded - Sue Jones. Accepted *nem con*.

Treasurer - John Bevan. Proposed - Terry Betts, seconded - Viv Bradman. Accepted *nem con*.  
The Committee members were re-elected *nem con*.

### *Summer Garden Party:*

Malcolm Ramsay spoke about arrangements for the garden party to be held at 154 North Road and John Bevan showed slides of the venue.

## Report of the Committee for 2017

The key events of 2017 were -

- 22 March - Refusal by County Council of Bengeo Quarry planning application
- 3 May - Launch of Hertford Heritage Trail with presentation by Andrew Sangster
- 12 September - Waitrose closes doors for the last time - memorably and sadly recorded by Mike Howarth in his "Goodbye Waitrose" video.
- 11 October - Approval by East Herts Council of planning application for redevelopment of Bircherley Green Centre despite a second Mike Howarth video circulated to Councillors - "Tearing the heart out of Hertford" - and Peter Norman's plea (on behalf of the Society) - "*We urge you not to ask yourselves "Is this scheme acceptable? Will it do?" Ask instead "Is this the best we can do for Hertford?" We submit that it's not.*"
- October / November - Examination by a Planning Inspector of the East Herts District Plan - the Society amplified objections, made earlier in the process, regarding policies relating to air quality - this has led to proposals by the Council to revise these before the final adoption of the Plan.

During 2017 members of the Committee concentrated particularly on communicating with our approximately 300 members and keeping them informed about what was happening in the town. Three printed Newsletters were sent out. A 16-page Winter 2016 -2017 edition was distributed at the very beginning of January and Spring and Autumn editions ran to 12 pages each. The Spring edition included the AGM papers.

Over the year the usual programme of talks and visits attracted the interest and support of the

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membership. Particularly noteworthy were the trip to Harwich and the Summer Garden Party. Comprehensive write-ups of the elements of this programme are to be found in the Newsletters.

The Newsletters also contain summaries of the objections and observations on planning applications submitted to Hertfordshire County Council regarding the Quarry proposal north of Bengeo and to East Herts Council for other cases.

2017 saw the re-launch of the Society's website ([www.hertfordcivicsociety.org.uk](http://www.hertfordcivicsociety.org.uk)). Adding new information is now much easier than before and can be viewed equally well on PC, tablet or phone. Thanks to John Bevan for a gargantuan effort.

It is now possible to reach more than 250 members of the Society by email. When each of the Newsletters is dispatched to the printer the contents are immediately e-mailed to members who are asked if this email version would meet their needs in future. To date 90 members have agreed to be "e-mail only".

Extensive use was made during 2017 of the opportunity to send information by email to members in between the issuing of our Newsletters. This has included -

- Reminders of the dates and subjects of our evening talks
- Details about other talks (for example Sustainable Transport by Dr Scott Copsey of Hatfield Polytechnic) and screening of parts of the film "Demain" and discussion of these - both events arranged in collaboration with Transition Hertford. ("Demain" features creative solutions to the challenges of climate change such as permaculture farms, urban agriculture projects, community-owned renewable projects, local currencies, creative schools and ambitious recycling projects.)
- Encouraging members to participate in the "Stop the Quarry" campaign (including responding to a survey of the value attached by the community to "Bengeo Field" and details of how to submit individual objections to the proposals).
- News items such as confirmation of the closure of the Waitrose Store, the submission of the planning application by developer Wrenbridge for the redevelopment of Bircherley Green and the sale to Aldi of the Consumers Association (Which) site on the Relief Road.

- Highlighting the “last chance” to lobby East Herts Councillors before the decision on the Bircherley Green planning application.
- Seeking the views of members about the proposed Aldi store so that those views could be reflected in the Society response to the planning application.
- Highlighting the opportunities and giving encouragement to members to sign petitions about local issues (two petitions against the temporary withdrawal of train service between Watton-at-Stone and Stevenage, and a petition about the proposed footpath / cycleway through the former railway land in Lower Bengoe).
- Encouragement of members in the neighbourhoods concerned to participate in the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans (by responding to the Sele Neighbourhood Area Plan survey in January and joining Working Groups set up in September to progress the preparation of the Bengoe Neighbourhood Area Plan).

In addition to alerting members of the Society to actions that they might choose to take as individuals we are anxious to involve members of the Society in what the Committee does and ensure that we know members’ views before we speak on their behalf. To that end please consider joining the Committee of the Society to ensure that a wide range of views and skills are represented.

Terry Betts, on behalf of the Committee

### **Treasurer’s Report for 2017**

#### *Commentary*

From the Treasurer’s perspective, 2017 was an unexceptional year, with only a small deficit of £216 (£1,655 deficit in 2016). We had no major projects incurring much expense - unlike in recent years with significant spending on the Awards and the Wallace sculpture. The Town Council reimbursed the Society for expenses associated with the successful Blue Plaques and Heritage Trail project completed later. None of these projects was intended to be income generating. Unveiling the sculpture provided an important publicity event for the Society. Sadly, the Awards gave us little public exposure. The others, like the fountain, continue to publicise the Society and give value to the town. Total income was £70 less, with deposit account interest £177 less, and membership subscriptions £10 down. (*cont p10*)

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Members of the Committee can also be contacted by email via the Society’s website at [www.hertfordcivicsociety.org.uk](http://www.hertfordcivicsociety.org.uk)

*Hertford Civic Society is a registered charity  
No 266111*

HERTFORD CIVIC SOCIETY

**INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT  
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER 2017**

|   | <u>2017</u>  | <u>2016</u>    |
|---|--------------|----------------|
| <b><u>Income</u></b>                      |              |                |
| Subscriptions and Donations               | 1,788        | 1,798          |
| Surplus or (Deficit) on Social Activities |              |                |
| Coach Visit                               | 192          | 20             |
| Garden Party                              | (15)         | -              |
|   | -----        | -----          |
| Sales of Publications                     | 10           | 22             |
| Interest on Deposit Account               | 206          | 383            |
| Recovery of Gift Aid Tax                  | 309          | 317            |
|   | -----        | -----          |
|   | 2,470        | 2,540          |
| <b><u>Less Society Expenses</u></b>       |              |                |
| Newsletter                                | 539          | 495            |
| General Meetings and Lectures             | 124          | 132            |
| Public Liability Insurance                | 336          | 334            |
| Maintenance of Society Equipment          | -            | -              |
| Depreciation of Society Equipment         | 173          | 139            |
| Other Expenses                            | 193          | 152            |
| Subscriptions and Donations               | 535          | 483            |
| Civic Activities                          |              |                |
| Salisbury Square Fountain                 | 894          | 1,414          |
| Civic Awards and Presentations            |              | 1,046          |
| Heritage Trail Expenses Reimbursed        | (108)        |                |
|   | -----        | -----          |
|   | 2,686        | 4,195          |
|   | -----        | -----          |
| <b>Surplus (Deficit) for the Year</b>     | <b>(216)</b> | <b>(1,655)</b> |
|   | =====        | =====          |



HERTFORD CIVIC SOCIETY

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER 2017

|  | <u>2017</u> | <u>2016</u> |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| <b>SOCIETY EQUIPMENT</b>                   |             |             |
| At cost                                    | 1,397       | 1,397       |
| Less Depreciation                          | 965         | 792         |
|  | -----       | -----       |
|  | 432         | 605         |
| <b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>                      |             |             |
| Sundry Debtors and Prepayments             | 342         | 385         |
| Cash at Bank, in Charities Deposit Fund    | 89,710      | 89,602      |
| And in Hand                                |             |             |
|  | -----       | -----       |
|  | 90,052      | 89,987      |
| <b>Less CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>            |             |             |
| Sundry Creditors                           | 314         | 89,738      |
|  | -----       | -----       |
|  | -----       | -----       |
| <b>NET ASSETS</b>                          | 90,170      | 90,387      |
|  | =====       | =====       |
| <b>ACCUMULATED FUND</b>                    |             |             |
| Balance as at 1 <sup>st</sup> January 2015 | 90,386      | 92,041      |
| Less Surplus (Deficit) for the Year        | (216)       | (1,655)     |
|  | -----       | -----       |
| <b>MEMBERS' FUNDS, as above</b>            | 90,170      | 90,386      |
|  | =====       | =====       |

**REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT EXAMINER**

I have examined the books and vouchers of HERTFORD CIVIC SOCIETY and, with the information and explanations received, report that the Balance Sheet and annexed Income and Expenditure Account accord therewith.

T.A.Busby

*(Treasurer's Report cont.)* Subscription income of £1,788 compares well with £1,877 received in 2011. Our total membership (306 in May 2017) is important both financially and to support our views on planning matters. However there is a strong suspicion that our average member is getting older, although we have no figures on this. We have no other significant sources of income - publication sales are trivial, and social activities (garden party and coach trip) are budgeted to break even.

General expenditure, other than on special projects, continued to rise. Producing and distributing the Newsletter rose to £539 from £495 in 2016, but was well down from £1,167 in 2011. The large reduction is explained primarily by a change of printer, and moving from 4 to 3 issues a year, and also more members receiving it by email and fewer copies being printed. We may in future encourage more members to receive it by email, in order to reduce both printing and postage costs. We spent £535 on donations and subscriptions to other organisations (£483 in 2016), mainly £495 to Civic Voice, the umbrella organisation supporting societies like ours, and £36 to the Campaign to Protect Rural England, with which we share concerns about the Green Belt.

The deposit account balance did not reduce in 2017; at the end of 2017 Cash at Bank and in Deposit Account was £89,710 (£102,668 at the end of 2011). On average this figure declined by £2,160 in each of 6 years. In 2017 the deposit account was not used to fund either major fountain expenditure or any special projects, as in many previous years.

On the metal base of the public fountain in Salisbury Square is an inscription "Confluence of the four rivers of Hertford, gift of Mrs Elsie Medlock to her town.... Sculptor William Pye 1994". Maintenance and operation of the fountain is a Society responsibility. Mrs Medlock's bequest is the source of the deposit

account funds. It was intended to and has funded not only the construction of the fountain, but also its continuing expense, as well as the Society more generally. We have only limited control over the potential year to year variability of expenses associated with the fountain. Any sudden increase in this expenditure, or on any special projects which are not supported by third parties, although they may be desirable, will probably need to be funded by a further reduction in the deposit account balance. No major increase in interest income from the deposit account can be expected in the short term.

### *Conclusions*

If we project forward the recent £2,160 pa average reduction in bank account balances, then the end of 2017 balance would reduce to £35,710 in 25 years, or at £3,000 pa to £14,710, assuming that we keep membership income constant. We would need to ask if these balances were then sufficient to fund all ongoing activities. If not, then we would need to consider if we should increase our income or reduce our expenditure. If we embarked on particularly expensive projects, or suffered a major decline in membership, we would reach this point much sooner. To increase income, we might consider recruitment, increasing subscription rates, using an existing activity to generate a surplus, or seek new sources of income. To reduce expenditure, we might consider actions to reduce further the use and distribution of paper, by increasing the use of email and the website, and to reduce or limit fountain expenditure. Some of these actions (e.g. recruitment) are desirable for other reasons and may need to be taken earlier (e.g. fountain). As charities should not carry large reserves unless it is to help fulfil their charitable aims, because of the way we have used our reserves, and because we have of the order of 25 years to replace or renew our reserves as a source of ongoing funding, I am not concerned

about the present position. I foresee that the main threats to this comfortable position would be a big drop in the number of our members, or much increased spending on the fountain or on expensive projects.

John Bevan 12/3/18

### CIVIC VOICE UPDATE

In a recent All Party Parliamentary Group debate on the National Planning Policy Framework and housing needs, Civic Voice supported MP Oliver Letwin's inquiry into why developers are building fewer houses than they have permissions for, called for adequate resources for local authorities to carry out their planning duties and asked for Green Belt protection in the NPPF to be clarified and, if necessary, strengthened. For further details, see [www.civicvoice.org.uk/news/](http://www.civicvoice.org.uk/news/)

### PREVIOUS TALKS TO MEMBERS

*Historical architectural gems of Hertfordshire*  
Dr Lee Prosser

When Forester Cottage in Ashwell village was saved from the developer's wrecking ball in the early 1960s, it became a cause celebre and helped launch the Hertfordshire Buildings Preservation Trust, thus giving a new lease on life to many neglected or endangered buildings of architectural and historic importance.

Just how far-reaching such inspirational moves would be was illustrated by Dr Lee Prosser, Curator of Historic Buildings, at the Historic Royal Palaces, in a talk to Hertford Civic Society. In an overview of the best of local architecture of previous centuries, he revealed how Hertfordshire was one of the

most significant counties in England for timber-framed buildings worth preserving and studying. And where timber was sparse, brickwork had had a strong influence.

His focus was not the grand palaces but the barns, mansions and merchants' houses that had evolved over the centuries and were too often neglected. Dr Prosser was a leading force in the listing and renovation scheme which initially, he said, was carried out "like a military operation" for six months. "We approached Hertfordshire and the people who own the buildings. Eighty of us visited historic buildings."

Timber dominated construction work because Hertfordshire has no good stone. "It has pudding stone," said Dr Prosser, "and the only good thing you can say about it is that it's better than Essex pudding stone. It's a county of timber frames with heavy clays in the South East, which became influential in charcoal and brick making."

Building styles were also shaped by emerging power bases after the Norman Conquest as the county was split between the diocese of London and Lincoln. St Albans Abbey had great influence on the landscape and buildings, he said, and the ancient divisions of East, West and North Herts were very distinctive.

Dr Prosser highlighted what he saw as "Hertfordshire gems", including Westwick Cottage near Hemel Hempstead, "a very important building in a national sense, tree-ring dating suggests it was built 1199-1200 it's the earliest inhabited timber-frame house in the whole country. We were able to look at it ten years ago during refurbishment when you could see the bones of the house

and very ancient scissor-brace roof framing that you hardly ever see.” It also has Romanesque capitols carved in wood, one of only a few that survives.

He cited Place House in Ware as a very interesting building; once the later extra floor was removed in the 1970s, it was possible to appreciate the house “in all its glory, with the original hall right up to crown roof”, he said. “The beautiful broach-stop finish to the beam was the way carpenters typically finished it in the C13. It demonstrates really clearly how important this building is.” There is also a Tudor screen with carvings of a pomegranate and rose, suggesting Catherine of Aragon and Tudor prince Arthur, or Henry.

Rothamsted Manor Harpenden, now part of the agricultural college, shows the influence on brick buildings of the London merchants who made their money and moved out to Hertfordshire. “We see the influence of metropolitan style with wonderful detail. It shows how in the C17 gentry living became sophisticated.”

During their investigations, Dr Prosser’s team also looked at Ashwell, home of the rescued Forester Cottage. This was a town of particular note, he said. “Pevsner said of Ashwell: ‘It’s the best small town anywhere with a huge variety of brick buildings’.”

Another area rich in heritage is St Albans, the plan for which was laid out in the C10, bringing it up the hill and away from the old Roman site. The Abbey Gatehouse is the only monastic building that survives with a magnificent courthouse over the gatehouse archway. However, it was Abbot John Moot’s building mania that intrigued Dr Prosser

most. “Moot had an obsession with barn-building,” he said, speculating on various reasons such as an investment in monastic land and parcelling-up acres to rent out as smaller farms following the Black Death. Dr Prosser’s team found eight such barns, for example, Croxley Great Barn, and there are still more to discover, though restoration has financial implications. Demolition of St Julian’s Barn, Park Street, in 1962 caused a furore and a pledge was given to reconstruct it. Fifty-five years on, however, the timbers are still in store and it would cost £1m to rebuild.

Barns were not merely utilitarian. One of the finest examples “for sheer beauty of timber frames” is Wymondley Priory Barn, built in 1541 by James Needham, the King’s Carpenter, who built the Great Hall roof of Hampton Court Palace.

Dr Prosser then considered some of the inns in Hertfordshire, notably, the White Hart in St Albans, with its fine wall paintings depicting Venus and Adonis. Piccott’s End, Hemel, is also famous for its wall paintings, including the dead Christ on the lap of Virgin Mary - dated to 1524, right on the eve of the Reformation. Finally, he touched on the rich industrial heritage of the county: the forge at Much Hadham and the astonishing 120 maltings that once occupied Ware, largely built with timbers imported from the Baltic Sea.

“We have in Hertfordshire, the most wonderful array of buildings that would keep someone like me occupied for the rest of my life,” Dr Prosser concluded.

Ian Nash