



NEWSLETTER

Winter 2017-18

Welcome to the Winter 2017-18 edition of the Newsletter.

Our new programme for 2018 is available, so please get out your diaries and book in our talks and activities. As well as hearing a wide variety of speakers, we will be having an outing to Sudbury and a garden party, so there will be plenty to interest, entertain and inform us.

John Bevan has now taken over responsibility for the website from Vernon Benjafield, who managed it for many years, and we would like to thank Vernon for all the work he put in. John has been reorganising the site and is asking for some assistance from members, as you will see on p4. If you haven't looked at the website recently, it's time to visit www.hertfordcivicsociety.org.uk and see the changes that have been made.

The Council have now published the modifications they propose to make to the District Plan. There will be a six-week consultation period on them between 15 February and 29 March. See the Council's website <https://www.eastherts.gov.uk/mainmodifications>

Hertfordshire County Council recently invited comments from the public on a Draft Plan for the future of Transport for the whole County for the period to 2031 [HCC LTP4 Transport Consultation]. Following consideration of all comments, the plan is expected to be adopted by the County Council in Spring 2018. HCS set up a working party, chaired by Malcolm Ramsay, to examine the Plan and they have submitted a detailed response, which will be available on our website. To get an overview of the important issues being addressed, you can read a summary of their response to the Draft Plan in this Newsletter.

There is also a Draft Minerals Plan, which Peter Norman is examining closely, and we will be reporting on this later. The Plan is available on the HCC website www.hertfordshire.gov.uk in the Consultations section.

HCS membership subscriptions were due in January - thank you to all those who have already paid. To take out or renew a subscription, or establish a standing order, please visit our website or contact the Membership Secretary, Annette Robinson - details are on p7.

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PROGRAMME

Historical architectural gems of Hertfordshire

Lecture, 21 February 2018

Dr Lee Prosser, Curator of Historic Buildings, at the Historic Royal Palaces, turns in another direction and gives us an overview of the best of our own Hertfordshire architecture from previous centuries. He is a particularly good lecturer, so good that Ware Society ask him back year after year, though not necessarily to tackle topics of any local relevance (as we prefer). Now that he is looking at the county where he once worked, we are in for a treat.

Walking the Lea Valley Path

Lecture, 21 March 2018

Our speaker, Elizabeth Hamilton, comes from the Hertfordshire branch of CPRE (Campaign to Protect Rural England). Last year we enjoyed a talk given by her colleague Kevin Fitzgerald, who concluded by reminding us of the importance of getting out into our ever-receding countryside. This year, besides touching occasionally on development issues, Elizabeth Hamilton takes us on a virtual walk with lots of beautiful slides to show us that lovely parts of the Hertfordshire countryside still endure, sometimes even quite close to towns. You might even be inspired to try some of this local trail yourself.

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.

Visit to Sudbury in Suffolk

6 June 2018

Sudbury is a wonderfully historic place. Even if you have been there before, you will be doing new things, only feasible in a group. We will get an introduction to the town by a local historian from the Sudbury Society, and we will also have a fascinating tour of an historic local brickyard where bricks are still being made by hand in the traditional way. They tell a great story about their survival into modern times and how they have developed an important niche through, for instance, providing the elaborately moulded bricks used in the recent renovation of Rye House. No one leaves the brickyard unmoved - and some people even contemplate how they might make use of the beautifully varied bricks themselves.

There will also be some 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, a previous chair of the National Trust.

The cost is the same as for last year, at £25. And we will of course travel in great comfort. You can book your place by contacting Malcolm Ramsay (most people now do this by email: his contact details can be found elsewhere in this Newsletter - see p6). Alternatively, it will be possible, after Easter, to secure a place by contacting Peter and Susan Brown. They have kindly agreed to go on taking bookings 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

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

We are fortunate to have been invited by Linda and David Haysey to hold a summer party at Roxford near Hertingfordbury. The backdrop is a beautiful eighteenth-century house (complete with striking modern extension) that happens to be set in a lovely garden. This was the house where the composer Haydn stayed for some of the time when he visited and worked in England in the 1790s. The party planners are still working on this event, and we hope to be able to share further details of a suitably entertaining event in the next newsletter. Tickets will be available from members of the Committee or (from May) from Peter and Susan Brown.

*Blue plaques trail in central Hertford
Wednesday 1 August 2018, starting at 7pm,
Salisbury Square*

Hertford Civic Society and Hertford Town Council combined forces to set up, last year, some 40 blue plaques celebrating historic locations around the town. There is an accompanying leaflet which lists them all, available from the Tourist Information Centre, now opposite Hertford Theatre. That leaflet does not however bring to life the how and why of these selected places. For that, you need your own guide. Last year, Jean Riddell and Geoffrey Rice each, on the same evening, led a tour: one focusing on the Fore Street area, and the other more on St Andrew St. The event was a popular one, so we are now re-running it, with the same two guides as before. 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 arrangements for this event are necessarily different from our normal ones. 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 (which the Civic Society helped to bring into being) 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. Not that Peter in particular needs much introduction to anyone in Hertford.

Times and venues

Lectures, as ever, are on Wednesdays, and start at 8.00pm, with refreshments from around 7.45pm. They continue to be in the hall of the Roman Catholic church in St John's Street. Other events take place in the stated locations, on the days/times mentioned above.

It will be possible to add another event later in the year, if there is a need to hear about and discuss anything else of particular importance to us. In that case, to inform members, we use email (for those whose addresses we know) and flyers in the library and other such places.

Malcolm Ramsay

OUR WEBSITE

I built the new website, using tools that meant I did not need to learn how to program, and which should mean that adding new information is easy. The website should look good, regardless of whether you look at it with a PC, tablet, or phone. What I did not expect to learn was that my skills as a photographer were lacking! The perspective in some of my shots looked quite wrong. So I found Photoshop Elements, and I am still learning. It is not easy to take photos that convey a message and look good enough on a website. That is why I am launching a competition for photos we can put on the website, which tell us something about Hertford and/or the issues facing the town, and which look good. There are no prizes, but the winners will see their photos on the website next to their names. I shall be the sole judge, with no appeals allowed, no closing dates, and no limits on numbers. Email them to john@jbevan.org.uk

John Bevan

PLANNING MATTERS

Retirement Community

The Public Inquiry into plans to build a retirement village on the former brickfields beyond the railway, west of Hertford Town Football Club, has been cancelled. The appeal has been withdrawn. Let us hope we've seen the last of this proposal, which was first put forward in 2012.

Bircherley Green

Following the Council's decision to grant permission for redevelopment, reported in the last Newsletter, we contacted the officers about some of the proposed conditions. The formal notice, including conditions, has now been issued. We remain concerned about condition 4 of the permission. There was discussion when the redevelopment proposals were under consideration about the importance of ensuring that the whole scheme (not just the hotel, for instance) is built. Condition 4 is designed to 'ensure that the approved development takes place in its entirety', and it requires a phasing plan to be submitted and approved, showing details of the proposed sequence of development including trigger points for successive phases to commence. All well and good, but there is no requirement that, once the phasing plan has been approved, the development must be carried out in accordance with it. This means that the developers could argue that, in law, they have complied with the condition merely by submitting the phasing plan for approval, but need not act on it. We do not suggest that Wrenbridge, the current developers, would behave in that way, but it must be remembered that the permission runs with the land: economic circumstances may change, and it is possible that the site could be sold on to another developer.

Alongside the planning permission, the Legal Agreement setting out the developers' obligations has been finalised. It confirms that only seven of the new flats will be "affordable".

This is disappointing: only 10% of the total and way below the proportion which the Council's policy requires. Unfortunately, Wrenbridge managed to convince the authority and their advisers that any higher proportion would make the scheme unviable. All the affordable units will be for shared ownership, rather than available to rent.

Richard Hale sports hall

There was some confusion about this application. At first it seemed that there would be no use by the public out of school hours, but it later became clear that there would have to be community use to obtain the support of Sport England and to comply with the Council's own policies. There is no dispute that in principle community use is desirable, but questions of traffic, access and potential disturbance to nearby residents have to be considered. The new hall is positioned on the corner of the school site next to the mini-roundabout, with all vehicles having to exit to Pegs Lane, so traffic is unlikely to be a problem. However, unless enough parking spaces were provided on-site, users could park either on Pegs Lane or in other nearby roads, which would be a nuisance to other road users and to residents. A representation was made to the Council on this point. The application has now been approved, subject to the submission and implementation of a car park management plan.

Bengeo Quarry

The inquiry into the appeal against the County Council's refusal to permit a new quarry off Wadesmill Road starts in May, and the revised application (to extract less gravel) is expected to be considered by the County on 28 March. The Stop Bengeo Quarry group are running a formidable campaign on both fronts and we have submitted representations against the proposals to both the County and the Planning Inspectorate.

We emphasised that the draft revision of the County Minerals Plan no longer includes the area

north of Bengeo as a suitable site for gravel working, largely because of the vulnerability of the groundwater aquifer which underlies it. Although the draft Plan is still at an early stage of preparation, the background facts which informed it must be material considerations in the determination of the present applications. The proposals also conflict with the existing Minerals Plan, which says that access to any new workings should be via the existing access to the mothballed Rickneys Quarry: the applications propose an entirely new quarry independent of Rickneys, with a new access from the B158. We also argued that no new quarry should be opened up before adjacent previously worked areas at Rickneys have been fully restored.

The Bridge House

An application has been made to demolish the vacant Bridge House pub opposite North Station and replace it with 14 apartments over a ground floor shop. We submitted an objection largely on the grounds that the design and appearance of the proposed building would be unsatisfactory in this sensitive location at an important entrance to the town. Whilst both residential and retail uses are acceptable in principle, the result of combining the two on this site is a building which dominates its surroundings and has a bulky, stark appearance; the parking area for the proposed shop severely limits any chance of a decent landscaped area in front of the building, which would have softened the impact of the flats. We also argued that this stretch of North Road is already difficult with a light-controlled pedestrian crossing, a bus stop, and traffic turning into the station, Cedar Close and Beane Road; a new shop would only add to the confusion.

The application came before the Development Management Committee with a recommendation for refusal. The most important reason for refusal, as set out in the officers' report, is the loss of a community facility without sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the public house is

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no longer needed. The application was unanimously refused.

Media House

Media House is the former office building in Ware Road, once the headquarters of the Mercury, which was recently converted into flats. The owners now propose to add an extra storey containing four more flats. We have made an objection, because the resulting building would be more bulky and taller than most of its neighbours, and draw attention to itself and dominate the street scene. This part of Ware Road is in the conservation area, and there has been a growing tendency in recent years towards taller buildings throughout the town centre, including in the conservation area; we made the point that each such building that is permitted chips away at Hertford's 'country town' feel. Media House is adjacent to a Listed office building occupied by Network Homes. Although not itself Listed and built some years later, the design of Media House complements that of its Listed neighbour without replicating it. If extended in the way now proposed, it would become the more dominant of the two buildings and demean the visual impact of the Listed block. We urged the Council to give full weight to policies designed to protect the conservation area and the setting of Listed buildings, and refuse permission.

Peter Norman

HERTFORDSHIRE DRAFT TRANSPORT PLAN - PUBLIC CONSULTATION: KEY POINTS BY HCS

In late 2017, Hertfordshire County Council issued a consultative document on future transport, called LTP4. This is a shortened and updated version of the response from Hertford Civic Society. We make practical suggestions on three issues of county-wide importance: east-west rapid transport; the Hertford bypass proposal; and, briefly, the imminent closure of part of the Hertford Loop railway.

A414 east-west rapid transport

Recognising the "relatively poor east-west connections" across the county, HCC proposes a 'bus rapid transport' scheme. However, any new scheme needs to appeal strongly to the public, to tempt people out of their cars. Piecemeal bus improvements are unlikely to do that. A tramway would be more expensive but could be more cost-effective. Lord Salisbury's Gascoyne Cecil Estates recently called for a tramway from St Albans to Hertford, via Hatfield and Welwyn (Transport for Hatfield and Beyond in Central Herts, 2016). As it

notes, “Trams make towns and cities more pleasant places by reducing road traffic by up to 14%: the six tram systems that exist in England alone cut 22 million car journeys each year across Sheffield, Nottingham, Manchester, West Midlands, Croydon and Blackpool.” Reg Harman has suggested a longer option, between Broxbourne and Watford, using existing railway branch lines at either end; its main/central section is for Hertford to St Albans, and it could be linked both to Harlow and Hemel Hempstead. (‘Transit through the Metropolitan Green Belt’, in Tramways and Urban Transit, September 2016.) This latter option would cost around £1 billion (at £20 million per kilometre).

That high cost needs to be put in context. The ‘official’ options proposed in LTP4, for enhancing the A414, would cost a similar amount. The latest estimate for the Hertford bypass, as discussed within HCC, is around £200 million, while two motorway junctions cost some £250 million each. These figures total £700 million, to which would need to be added other contemplated improvements: conceivably a further £300 million. In effect, HCC is looking to spend around £1 billion on upgrading the A414, which would simply facilitate more long-distance car and lorry traffic, besides causing further congestion and pollution elsewhere, away from the key junctions/improvements. Yet a tramway would enhance access to Hertford and other town centres while reducing car traffic and pollution from vehicles.

Hertford bypass

The fact that the LTP4 proposal for a Hertford bypass would cost some £200 million means that it involves “further growth of Hertford beyond that currently included in the emerging East Herts Local Plan.” LTP4 seems simply to assume that enabling Hertford to grow would be a good thing. But this is not self-evident. An alternative strategy would be to retain Hertford as a pleasant market town of character, and accommodate the additional housing and business needs of the region in other parts of the County or beyond. Hertford at its present size has a distinctive character which would be lost if it were drastically extended outwards.

There is an alternative option. LTP4 notes that a key lesson from research is that reductions in single occupancy car use were more achievable when accompanied by reductions in parking spaces combined with sustainable transport promotion. Indeed, LTP4 even cites a Hertfordshire case study, at Warner Brothers Studios, near Watford, where this crucial combination led to the proportion of visitors arriving by car reducing from 80% to 50% between 2012 and 2015, while the proportion of staff arrivals by single occupancy car

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fell from 88% to 61%. Currently, HCC has done little to develop these options for its own staff, by way of a travel plan. County Hall has by far the largest car park in Hertford, with well over a thousand spaces: more than in all the public car parks in central Hertford put together. It is quite happy to issue car passes on demand even to staff living as close by as West Street - despite the fact that its own monitoring has revealed that a significant proportion of rush-hour traffic on the A414 in Hertford involves cars going to/from County Hall or Wallfields.

If the County has not so far led 'by example' (which if done well could inspire major employers in other Hertfordshire towns), it might soon feel more exposed on this issue, as its physically close neighbour East Herts Council has recently started thinking positively about this. A recommendation of EHC's Sustainable Transport Task and Finish Group in 2017 was: "Consider a charge for use of the car park at East Herts Council Offices [which has over 200 spaces], alongside an incentive scheme for those who car-share or use lower emissions vehicles." We believe that this kind of approach can be beneficial to staff: delivering cheaper, more enjoyable journeys to work, together with improvements in their morale, if car sharing is properly introduced (carefully, gradually, and with support and monitoring).

Rapid reinstatement of the Hertford loop line
The northern part of the Hertford Loop rail line is due to be curtailed later this year, with buses put in place 'temporarily', through to/from Stevenage (pending the construction of a new platform there). This is precisely the kind of development that is likely to result in more people commuting by car on the overcrowded roads between Hertford and places like Stevenage, Hitchin, Letchworth and even Cambridge.

This temporary measure could have lasted up to seven years. Fortunately, after much lobbying, Transport Minister Jo Johnson recently

announced that the closure would be shortened, concluding in 2020 (*Mercury*, 1 February 2018). If, however, funding were to fall short once again, we would still suggest to HCC that it lend Network Rail the necessary money, to minimise the duration of this disaster. Keeping vehicles off our congested roads, as far as reasonably possible, should be the County's top priority in transport policy.

Conclusion

HCC needs to be much more active in developing sustainable options. One good local example is the recent suggestion, under the auspices of BNAP (Bengeo Neighbourhood Area Plan), that the path constructed by Sustrans for walkers and cyclists between Hertford (Hartham) and Ware should be extended westwards, to Hertford North, along a disused railway. And why stop there? Back in the 1990s, Sustrans proposed a direct route from Hertford North towards County Hall. It would link County Hall with the national cycle network, precisely the kind of change that might help make a difference.

Malcolm Ramsay, on behalf of the HCS Transport Plan working party, Reg Harman, David Hunt, Peter Norman and Richard Threlfall.

The consultation period is now closed, but the Draft Plan in full and supporting documents are available on the HCC website at

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/about-the-council/consultations/transport-and-highways/proposal-to-introduce-local-transport-plan-ltp4.aspx>

PANSHANGER COUNTRY PARK IS OPEN FOR 2018

Work ended on 31 December 2017 to excavate gravels and other minerals from land within the boundaries of the Park. Tarmac do have work of remediation to carry through. This is in the west of the Park to remove the gravel washing plant and weighbridge, also work of restoration to the main lake laid out by Humphrey Repton in 1798. Adjoining the Country Park north of Letty Green work has commenced to infill and grade land owned by Tarmac outside the Park but within the Grade 2* Park and Garden. This is work permitted under a separate planning permission granted in December and controlled by a section 106 agreement with 100 conditions.

Tarmac have noted the “Hurrah” statement on the Friends of Panshanger website and have asked that we “enjoy Panshanger Park safely by only using areas open for public access” - that is to know and use the Countryside Code - use footpaths, leave gates as you find them, do not disturb farm animals, control dogs, take litter home, do not light fires.

Committees of experienced advisors are compiling plans for work to manage the Country Park and explain the historical importance of the landscape, the buildings and the ecology.

The current programme of Winter Work has started to re-establish views laid out by Repton by clearing invasive trees and scrub, to improve marginal vegetation and grasses. Konik ponies are grazing the grassland alongside the Osprey lake. Wooden gates are replacing galvanised gates and buddleia and scrub removed by the site of the house and the garden paths. Preparations are underway nationally to celebrate the 300th anniversary of Humphrey Repton and will include our park and garden unique for the water feature built by Repton - more usually a statement by Capability Brown,

who only constructed a ha-ha for the old house at Cole Green.

Richard Threlfall

HERTFORD'S TREES

Before this grey, wet, windy and cold weather came our way last December, I so greatly enjoyed and appreciated the greeny-gold of the trees and bushes, and some of the golds and reds, all shining when the sun shone. We need them all.

All along the A414, the A119 past Hertford North station, up Bengeo Street, along the B1197 towards Hoddesdon, beside Gascoyne Way and the grass by Which's offices - there are so many trees and bushes (and a late clematis hanging over someone's wall) - and on the roundabouts - they are all a pleasure! Perhaps a calming, friendly, cared-for feeling to Hertford? I think so!

The other thing I appreciate, and am thankful for, is the number of fairly short streets and roads in the town-centre; a happy, historic network and easily walkable to enable us to get to where we want to go. There are a lot of us 'oldies' and I do hope this gentle, pleasing characteristic will not be 'improved' or destroyed, nor the colours and textures of the nice mix of building materials. I rather dread what is probably going to happen next in the town, and no storeys higher than the present ones, PLEASE!

Sheila Pettman

VISIT TO STOUR VALLEY

Our visit began with a guided tour of Harwich, led by members of the Harwich Society.

The town owes its importance to its position at the confluence of the Rivers Stour and Orwell, which provides a large harbour that can be accessed at any state of the tide. Since the Middle Ages Harwich has traded extensively with northern Europe, but by the C17 it was also sending ships across the Atlantic, as shown in an exhibition on the Ha'penny Pier. It was the point of departure not only for the Pilgrim Fathers' Mayflower, but also for the ill-fated settlers of Jamestown, many of whom died in the early years.

Moored alongside the Ha'penny Pier is another reminder of two important aspects of Harwich's past. The LV18 is the last of the Trinity House manned light vessels which warned shipping away from danger points around our coasts.



Launched in 1958 then decommissioned and sold into private ownership in 1997, it starred in *Radio Sunshine: The Boat that Rocked* in 2008. This film celebrated the days of pirate radio,

when Harwich was the departure point for the crews of the pirate radio stations, such as Radio Caroline, which operated out in the North Sea beyond British waters. Now it houses a permanent exhibition of memorabilia from those times.

The town also had substantial military importance. From 1660 it was a significant naval dockyard, with diarist and Secretary for the Navy Samuel Pepys sitting as MP for the town, and by 1724 Daniel Defoe was boasting that the harbour was able to receive “the greatest number of ships that ever the world saw together”. The Redoubt coastal fortress was built to guard against Napoleonic invasion and there were so many military personnel in the town that St Nicholas church was enlarged using the modern technology of cast iron columns and window frames.

Later, the railway brought passengers from London for the daily ferries to the Continent and Scandinavia, leading to the building of the magnificent Great Eastern Hotel on the Quay. Harwich also has one of the earliest cinemas, the Electric Palace, built in 1911.



The Cinematography Act of 1909 restricted film showings to purpose-built premises with a separate projection room, following a number of disastrous fires caused by films being shown in canvas marquees and wooden village halls. Nor was separation confined to the projector in this cinema: occupants of the luxurious one shilling seats at the back had their own entrance and toilet, while everyone else made do with less comfortable seats for sixpence or a place on a wooden bench for twopence.

But Harwich's prosperity was not to last and its once intense bustle has to be inferred from the remaining clues. The naval dockyard closed in the 1820s when the Royal Navy stopped building timber ships; the only reminders today are its great bell, which was rescued from a rubbish dump, and the enormous, man-powered, wooden, treadwheel crane, now a Scheduled Ancient Monument, renovated by Tendring Council and the Harwich Society.



Trade in container ships has moved to Felixstowe, the railway for the ferries now stops short of Harwich at Parkeston Quay and only the route to the Netherlands remains since the coming of cheap air travel. The lighthouse is now a museum and the Great Eastern Hotel has been converted into flats. The cinema closed in the 1950s, following the great flood of 1953 and as television became ubiquitous, and was due for demolition in the 1970s, but was saved, thanks to an observant architecture student who reported it to his professor, who was able to get the demolition halted. With help from the Heritage Lottery Fund, it has been substantially restored, is Grade II* Listed, and now hosts live performances as well as films and theatre screenings.

After a pub lunch at Dedham, we were able to visit the impressive C15 church with its massive tower, which appeared in many of Constable's paintings. Although most of the decorative features were destroyed by iconoclasts in the C16 and C17, there remains a fragment of glass dedicated to the Sherman family, whose descendants crossed the Atlantic and were involved in founding Rhode Island, signing the Declaration of Independence and leading the Southern army in the Civil War.

Our final stop was a self-guided tour of Dedham Vale Vineyard, which produces both still and sparkling wines and cider. Essex has long been the home of fruit-growing with its low rainfall and plentiful sunshine and so grapes also thrive, despite damage caused by a late frost. Most of the grapes are German varieties normally grown in the Rhineland, and we were able to sample some in a restful waterside setting before leaving for home.

Sue Jones
Pictures by Ian Nash

FERGUS McMULLEN - THE FAMILY BREWERY

Unlike so many of our smaller breweries which have been absorbed into the giant drinks conglomerates, McMullen's is still going strong after nearly two centuries. Fergus McMullen entertained us with the story of how this has happened.

The business's beginnings were inauspicious. The first McMullen to live in Hertford was William, who came from the north of Ireland in 1790 as factor (or business agent) to the Marquis of Downshire, who was at that time living in Hertford Castle. Of William's nine children, Peter became an apprentice cooper, but got off to a poor start; not only was he sacked for laziness, but was also in trouble with the law for poaching. His life turned around when he married Sarah Manning, twelve years his senior. His barrel-making improved, he obtained a brewing licence and started a small brewery (a common occupation at the time) on the present site of the Woolpack. He is credited with inventing the recipe for AK, which Fergus described as "soft, gentle, easy drinking, a good conversation pint," and at his death owned not just a brewery, but five pubs as well.

It was under two of Peter's sons, Alexander and Osmond Henry that the business really took off. They acquired the site in Hartham Lane and sunk three wells, over 200 ft deep. The brewery expanded and they bought two more, in Waltham Abbey and Epping, plus their associated pubs. Alexander became mayor of Hertford three times and donated the gates of Hertford Castle to the town; McMullen's was now an



important local business with extensive property influence.

But by the mid C20, breweries were up against some serious challenges. Not only were many faced with heavy death duties in the post-war period, but the British taste for traditional beer was collapsing from the 1950s as a wider range of drinks became available. After a long struggle with the government, McMullen's death duties problem was solved by selling properties in Ware and London to pay the tax bill. Commercially, the brewing and pub business has had to change over the years. Smaller pubs have been sold and others have had to diversify by becoming

restaurants as well as pubs. Beer output has been reduced by selling a large part of the brewery site to Sainsbury's and changes in taste for beer has been accommodated by installing the Rivertown micro-brewery to experiment in developing new flavours.

Not all traditions have gone out of the window.

They have been using the same maltsters and hop dealers for over a hundred years and have a horse-drawn dray and a steam wagon which appear on ceremonial occasions. The company is still family owned and run, with members who choose to come into the business being expected to get experience of work outside the family firm before they join. In Fergus McMullen's words, "We've all been born with a silver malt shovel in our mouths, but we tell our children that it's not ours, it's ours to make better. We want to stay in Hertford and keep all this going".

Sue Jones
Picture by Ian Nash