

Hertfordshire Association for Local History

(Charity Number 280449)

News and Events

Spring 2019



Dates for your Diary

Saturday 18 May 2019

HALH Spring Meeting and AGM, Pirton

Monday 15 July 2019

Summer Visit, Woodhall Park, Watton-at-Stone

Saturday 9 November 2019

Symposium: *Local History: Landscape and Archaeology*

HALH Spring Meeting and AGM 2019

The next Spring Meeting and Annual General Meeting of HALH will take place on Saturday 18 May 2019 at Pirton Village Hall, 45 High Street, Pirton, Hitchin SG5 3PS. Admission is free for HALH members, £2 for visitors.

The morning session will commence at 11.00. This year at the Spring Meeting we will be marking the legacy of Lionel Munby, who died ten years ago on Sunday 19 April 2009 at the age of 90. Lionel was one of a generation of local historians who enjoyed sharing the knowledge and skills gained in their academic life with those interested in exploring and recording the story of their own communities.

There were many localities in Hertfordshire where Lionel ran classes. Local history societies already existed in some of these places, but in others it was Lionel's classes which led to their foundation. During the morning session we hope to have a series of short presentations from some of these societies so that we can learn more about their association with Lionel and what they've been doing during the intervening years.

Also as part of the morning session we will have a presentation from Hertfordshire's landscape historian Anne Rowe about her latest book, published by the Herts University Press, entitled *Tudor and Early Stuart Parks of Hertfordshire*. This book is a continuation of the research which Anne carried out for *Medieval Parks of Hertfordshire*, published by the University in 2009, and which is being reprinted to coincide with the publication of the new book.

The afternoon session will commence with the AGM, followed by the Lionel Munby memorial lecture. This year our speaker will be David Short, who will talk to us about 'The Middling Sorts' – the people who were mentioned in the overseer's accounts but who were not 'the poor'.

David has been an active local historian for many years, particularly in Hertfordshire, and was a close friend of Lionel Munby. He was formerly in charge of the Ashwell Field Studies Centre. He has long been closely involved in the work of HALH and has written a number of local history books. He is also a parish councillor for Ashwell.

In his talk David will draw upon a case study of the overseer's accounts for Ashwell from 1675 to 1725. There have, of course, been many studies dealing with the plight of the poor in former times. In this talk, however, David will highlight the role of those people who provided services or support to the poor. Such people included the overseers themselves; those who nursed, housed and made clothes and shoes for the poor; those who drafted legal documents relating to the poor for the parish; those in the building trades who repaired their houses. David will show us just who these 'good of the parish' were and what place they occupied in society.

website: www.halh.org.uk

HALH Summer Visit 2019

This year's HALH Summer Visit will take place on the afternoon of Monday 15 July 2019 at Woodhall Park, Watton-at-Stone, where we will be the guests of Ralph and Alexandra Abel Smith. Further details are given on the booking form on page iv.

Woodhall Park lies within the valley of the River Beane. The house dates from the mid-1770s and was designed by the architect Thomas Leverton for Sir Thomas Rumbold of the East India Company. It replaced an earlier Tudor mansion destroyed by fire in 1772. The house was enlarged in later years and the park much enhanced, especially by the creation of an ornamental lake along the course of the River Beane.

In 1801 the estate was purchased by a London banker, Samuel Smith. For the next three successions it passed to the eldest son, two of whom bore the Christian name Abel. They all served as Conservative MPs for various constituencies. They also played leading roles in local and county affairs; amongst others, on the County Bench and later the County Council, the Hertfordshire Yeomanry, the Hertford Board of Guardians, the governing body of Haileybury College, and the Herts Reformatory School. They were also patrons

of five livings. They funded the building and restoration of churches, and supported the establishment of local schools.

This patrician lifestyle came to an end when Samuel's great-grandson, Abel Henry Smith, stood down as MP in 1910, having fallen foul of the local party over tariff reform. During the 1920s he was obliged to reduce the establishment at Woodhall, owing to the pressure of increased taxation and the expense of running a country estate. Following his death in a hunting accident at Bramfield in 1930, the estate passed to his brother Edward who leased the mansion to Heath Mount School in 1934. On his death in 1937 it was inherited by his son Thomas, and then his son Ralph. The family lived in a series of smaller houses on the estate until 1957 when the former stables were converted into the family home, now occupied by Ralph and Alexandra Abel Smith and their family. The estate is now largely run by their son Thomas.

Lionel Munby (1918-2009)

Lionel Munby was born in Leeds on 7 May 1918. He was educated at Clifton College, Bristol and Hertford College, Oxford where in 1939 he obtained a First in Modern History. His war service was undertaken mainly in Italy, and then in 1946 he secured a teaching post at the University of Cambridge's Board of Extra-Mural Studies. From there he also started teaching local history in Hertfordshire.

Lionel always made a point of getting his students actively involved in their learning and in looking at history through the lives of ordinary people. This involved them in reading original documents, deciphering strange handwriting, studying maps and walking fields, and then writing it all up. Many Hertfordshire local history publications produced between 1960 and 2000 owe their inspiration and editing to Lionel, while his students often went on to found local history societies.

In addition to teaching, Lionel edited *The Amateur Historian*, later *The Local Historian*, for

20 years. He also involved himself in organisations which sought to promote local history. He was a committee member of HALH from 1955–87, during which time he served as Chairman and President. He provided the inspiration for the founding of the Hertfordshire Record Society and became its first secretary, and he was also involved in the British Association for Local History, serving in later years as its President.

Alongside this work, Lionel found time to write a number of books, including *Hertfordshire Population Statistics 1563–1801* (1964), *The Hertfordshire Landscape* (1977) and *The Common People are not nothing* (1995). He also wrote practical guides such as *Secretary Hand: A Beginner's Introduction* (1984), *Reading Tudor and Stuart Handwriting* (1988), and *How much is that worth?* (1989) – all indispensable items on any local historian's bookshelf.

Lionel died peacefully on Sunday 19 April 2009 at the age of 90.

HALH Symposium 2019

Local History: Landscape and Archaeology

The symposium will take place on Saturday 9 November 2019 at the village hall in Woolmer Green, when we shall be looking at the links between archaeology and local history and ranging widely across the county.

Archaeology used to be a very specialised subject, the province of such august bodies of antiquarians as the St Albans and Hertfordshire Architectural and Archaeological Society and the East Herts Archaeological Society. Their activities were frequently reported at length in the local papers, but one can be sure these reports would have gone completely over the head of the general reader. It's a far cry from today when archaeology has become a television staple, thanks to programmes like *Time Team*, and the documentaries fronted by the likes of Alice Roberts, Neil Oliver and Julian Richards.

Archaeology is also a key consideration in many development proposals, where an

archaeological survey of the site has to be undertaken, and an appropriate amount of time allowed for the investigation of any significant remains. Many recent archaeological discoveries in the county have come about through such emergency excavations.

Excavation, the archetypal form of archaeological investigation, has become enormously expensive and this tends to rule out the kind of widescale excavations overseen by Mortimer and Tessa Wheeler at Verulamium in the 1930s. This has not halted progress, however, for we now have access to a wide range of techniques including, for example, geophysics.

The programme has yet to be finalised, but it could well include the following topics.

HERTFORDSHIRE ASSOCIATION FOR LOCAL HISTORY

CASH ACCOUNTS SUMMARY, 2018 (For year ended 31 December 2018)

	Year 2017 (£ rounded)	Year to 2018 (£ rounded)
RECEIPTS		
Subscriptions	2341	2294
Donations	0	0
Interest	18	35
Events (net)	524	687
Total	2883	3016
PAYMENTS		
<i>Herts Past & Present</i> (net)	1410	1477
AGM / Membership	532	562
BALH subscription & insurance	75	75
Website, etc.	182	126
General administration	100	210
Donations	0	0
Total	2299	2450
Cash increase for the year	584	566

Further details on request and/or at the AGM to be held on Saturday 18 May 2019 (see page i)

Chris Brimblecombe (Hon. Treasurer)

- The strained relationship between archaeology and narrative history, and the close parallels which exist between social and landscape history and archaeology.
- Reports on particular excavations and surveys which have taken place in the county in recent years.
- An update on the Barnet Battlefield Survey, which has been seeking to locate the site of the Battle of Barnet, 1471.
- Industrial archaeology and how it has been used in the study of Hertfordshire's older industries, such as brewing, malting and paper-making.
- Historic gardens, seeking to rediscover the gardens created by Hertfordshire's nobility and gentry in the grounds about their mansions – gardens which were abandoned when their style went out of fashion, but whose features can sometimes still be detected in the landscape.

**HERTFORDSHIRE ASSOCIATION FOR LOCAL HISTORY
SUMMER VISIT**

Woodhall Park, Watton-at-Stone, Hertford SG14 3NG

Monday 15 July 2019

14.30 – 16.30

For this year's Summer Visit we will be the guests of Ralph and Alexandra Abel Smith at Woodhall Park, Watton-at-Stone. The mansion was for many years the home of the Abel Smith family, but since 1934 has been occupied by the Heath Mount School which today serves as an independent day and flexi-boarding school for children aged 3-13 years. Our visit has been arranged to coincide with the school holidays.

The entrance to the estate is off the A602 Stevenage to Ware road and there is ample parking space within the grounds. The visit will commence at 14.30 with a walk around the exterior of the main house. We will then be given a guided tour of the decorated rooms within.

There is no charge for the visit, but we do ask you to notify us if you wish to attend. We would also ask you to make a donation during the visit which we will then pass on to Ralph and Alexandra for them to give to a charity of their choosing.

Please could you send the form below to:

Ruth Jeavons, 44 Necton Road, Wheathampstead, St Albans, Herts AL4 8AU
(Email: ruth.jeavons@ntlworld.com)

Name(s)

Address

.....Postcode

Tel. No.

Email address

As there is no charge for the visit we will not be issuing tickets, but we will send out a confirmation that your application has been received. This will be done by email. If you do not have email, then please supply a small stamped addressed envelope for the receipt of your confirmation.

Is your society involved in events or activities which you would like to see featured in *Herts Past and Present*? If so, please contact either:

Ruth Jeavons, 44 Necton Road, Wheathampstead, St Albans, Herts AL4 8AU
(email: ruth.jeavons@ntlworld.com); or

Philip Sheail, 41 Cowper Crescent, Hertford SG14 3DZ (email: philip.sheail@gmail.com)
(Deadlines: third week of January, July)