

Hertfordshire Association for Local History

(Charity Number 280449)

News and Events

Spring 2021



Dates for your Diary

Saturday 15 May 2021	HALH Spring Meeting, via Zoom
Saturday 18 September 2021	Summer Visit, Pirton
Saturday 13 November 2021	Symposium: <i>Hertfordshire's Waterways</i> , Tewin

HALH Spring Meeting 2021

The next Spring Meeting of HALH will take place on the afternoon of Saturday 15 May 2021. The meeting will be conducted via Zoom.

The 2020 Spring Meeting and AGM at Bramfield last May was cancelled owing to the Covid-19 pandemic. We were also unable to hold the Summer Visit to Pirton and the annual symposium at Tewin. However, the talks scheduled for the symposium on the theme of 'The Country House at War' were delivered via Zoom each Wednesday evening during November and drew a large online audience. We also sent out a postal poll to all HALH members and announced the results of the poll at the start of the first evening meeting on 4 November 2020.

At the time of going to print Hertfordshire is still subject to Tier 4 restrictions which means that we are currently unable to hold live events. The national programme of vaccination for Covid-19 has commenced. The Government has indicated that restrictions won't be substantially lifted until a large section of the population has been vaccinated and at present there is no firm indication as to when that might be.

In view of these uncertainties, therefore, we've decided to hold the 2021 Spring Meeting via Zoom. The AGM normally forms part of the Spring Meeting, but on this occasion we feel it will be much simpler to conduct the AGM via a postal poll. A form containing the postal poll is being sent out with *Herts Past & Present*.

The Zoom session for the Spring Meeting will commence at 3.00pm on Saturday 15 May 2021. The session will begin with the presentation of awards for personal achievement in local history in Hertfordshire, and will be followed by the Lionel Munby lecture. Our speaker this year will be Dr John Baker, Associate Professor in Name-Studies at the University of Nottingham who will be talking to us about the place-names of Hertfordshire.

You will find three other items distributed with this issue of *News & Events*. They are:

- A leaflet containing the programme for the Spring Meeting, the Annual Report 2020 and the matters requiring approval by the membership of HALH (page 4).
- A postal poll. This consists of a form on which members can record their vote for the matters set out on page 4 of the above leaflet.
- A flyer asking you to confirm your email address, where necessary.

Members will be contacted by email nearer the time with an invitation to register for the Lionel Munby lecture by a specified date. After that date, the event will be opened up and non-members given the opportunity to register.

website: www.halh.org.uk

HALH Summer Visit 2021

This year's HALH Summer Visit will take place on the afternoon of Saturday 18 September 2021 at Pirton. This visit should have taken place last year, but was cancelled owing to the Covid-19 pandemic. Helen Hofton, local resident and chair of HALH, will be our host. The exact nature of the visit will depend on what restrictions are in force at the time and, of course, on the weather. We hope that Helen will be able to give a guided tour of the village, though the tour party may have to be limited in size. This shouldn't be a problem, however, since we think that many members will simply welcome the opportunity to meet up again after all the months of separation. Further details are given on the booking form on page iv.

Pirton has a long and complex history. There are Neolithic burial mounds and Bronze Age barrows in the surrounding countryside, while the village itself evolved from a late Iron Age settlement and from a number of scattered Romano-British farmsteads.

It also contains the earthworks of a motte and bailey castle, built during the civil war between King Stephen and Queen Matilda from 1135 to 1154. The eastern bailey encloses the parish church of St Mary, which probably dates from the eleventh century. The village was very badly affected by the Black Death in 1349 and by subsequent outbreaks of plague, and thus by the beginning of the fifteenth century the population was only a quarter of what it had been in earlier times. It

took several centuries for the village to recover and as it did so, its layout and character changed to one of small cultivated fields, paddocks, orchards, and vegetable plots, lying between clusters of farms and cottages.

By 1801 Pirton had a population of about 500 and this figure was destined to increase in the latter part of the century with the building of new houses, mostly terraced cottages but also some larger Victorian villas. Several council estates were built between 1920 and 1955, and since 1965 there has been a good deal of private infill development on former open spaces, farmyards, fields and orchards. As a result of these trends, Pirton today has about 1,300 inhabitants and more than 520 dwellings.

The Lionel Munby Lecture, 2021

This year's Lionel Munby Lecture is entitled 'Place-names and the early administrative structure of Hertfordshire' and will be delivered by Dr John Baker, Associate Professor in Name-Studies at the University of Nottingham.

Dr Baker has worked at the Institute for Name-Studies since 2005. He was born and raised in Hertfordshire, and his earliest publications focused on interdisciplinary approaches to the transition from Romano-British to Anglo-Saxon culture in this region. He subsequently worked on early medieval defence and governance in England, and is currently contributing to the final volumes of the English Place-Name Society's survey of Shropshire.

The administrative geography of Hertfordshire in the eleventh century is set out in some detail in the Domesday survey of 1086. We learn there, among other things, the

extent and the names of the shire's subdivisions, known as hundreds. However, the administrative snapshot Domesday provides seems to present a shire that had already undergone significant change over the preceding decades and centuries.

Considerable evolution in local administrative and governmental arrangements must have occurred during periods for which relatively few written sources for the county survive, and some of these changes can be identified through landscape historical approaches.

The lecture will explore the use of place-names within a broader interdisciplinary framework, and consider what 'onomastics' – the study of the history and origin of proper names – can contribute to our understanding of the processes that led to the emergence of Hertfordshire.

HALH Symposium 2021

Hertfordshire's Waterways

The symposium will take place on **Saturday 13 November 2021** at the **Memorial Hall in Tewin**, when we shall be looking at the rivers and waterways of the county – their natural history, the way they've influenced human settlement, and the role they've played in the development of industry and transport.

Most of Hertfordshire's rivers belong to two main river systems – that of the Colne and its tributaries in the west, the Lea in the east. Both systems flow southwards from the Chilterns and work their way through the London conurbation to join the Thames.

The rivers impinge on many aspects of the county's history. They provided routes for travel and sources of fish and raw materials for thatching and basket-weaving from prehistoric times onwards. In the Middle Ages the rivers powered numerous watermills, used at first for grinding corn but later for the mechanical fulling of cloth, the pulping of rags for paper, and the crushing of oil seed for the production of linseed oil and cattle cake.

The River Lea was always of importance for transporting goods to and from London. Its course was steadily improved through the construction of cuts and locks, and eventually extended to Hertford and Sawbridgeworth. In the early 1800s a wholly new canal came into being in the west of county, later known as the Grand Union Canal, which passed through Watford and Berkhamsted on its way from London to Birmingham. The county also came to play a major role in supplying drinking water to the capital, most notably through the construction of the New River.

The programme for the symposium has yet to be finalised, but the topics could include the following:

HERTFORDSHIRE ASSOCIATION FOR LOCAL HISTORY		
CASH ACCOUNTS SUMMARY, 2020 (For year ended 31 December 2020)		
	Year 2019 (£ rounded)	Year to 2020 (£ rounded)
RECEIPTS		
Subscriptions	2116	1803
Interest	50	22
Events (net)	479	80
Total	2645	1905
PAYMENTS		
<i>Herts Past & Present</i> (net)	1333	1391
AGM / Membership	320	503
BALH / Insurance	75	75
Website, etc.	167	126
General administration	0	116
Total	1895	2211
Cash change for the year	750	-306
Further details on request		
NB: After ten years I am standing down as Hon. Treasurer, so if you would be interested in taking on this role, please contact me, Chris Brimblecombe, on: cbramble39@btinternet.com		

- The campaigns to save our chalk streams and restore their wildlife habitats.
- The construction and impact of waterways such as the Grand Union Canal and Lee Navigation.
- The story behind the construction of the New River.
- The development and decline of the county's watermills
- The waterside industries (brewing, malting, papermaking) and public utilities (water supply, sewage disposal).
- How streams and rivers were used to enhance country house estates.
- Recreation: fishing, wildfowling with hawks or guns, otter-hunting, narrow boating.
- Rivers as a source of food: fish, eels, lampreys, waterbirds, heronries, watercress.
- Water meadows and their management.

HERTFORDSHIRE ASSOCIATION FOR LOCAL HISTORY
SUMMER VISIT

The village of Pirton, near Hitchin, Hertfordshire

Saturday 18 September 2021

14.30 – 16.30

This year's Summer Visit will take place at Pirton in north Herts where our host will be HALH chairman and local resident, Helen Hofton. We'll be able to park in the car park to the rear of Pirton Village Hall (where we held the Spring Meeting in May 2019).

The address of the hall is:

High Street, Pirton, Hitchin SG5 3PS

Helen will meet us close by the hall at the Methodist Church. To get to the church, turn left as you leave the hall and walk along the High Street past the school. The church is just the other side of the school entrance.

The exact nature of the visit will depend on what Covid-19 restrictions are in place at the time. We hope it will be possible for Helen to give us an introduction to the village inside the Methodist Church and then take us on a guided walk. The numbers for the walk may have to be limited, but we envisage that many members will be glad of the chance simply to meet up again after the separation we've endured over the past year.

We also hope it will be possible for refreshments to be served at the church. If so, a small charge will be made. It would be helpful to the caterer if you could let us know whether you intend to come on the visit.

Please could you send the form below to:

Helen Hofton, 1 Holwell Road, Pirton, Herts SG5 3QU

Telephone: 01462 712208

Email: helen_hofton@hotmail.com

Name(s)

Address

..... Postcode

Tel. No.

Email address

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.