



Hertfordshire Association for Local History 1949-2024

WELCOME TO OUR

January Newsletter

A message from our President, David Short



When I was told HALH was going to celebrate its 75th birthday with a year-long calendar of events, I was delighted. For many of us who have been involved in the history of Hertfordshire for some time HALH, and HLHC before it, has been a way of not only finding out about our part of the county but to put our patch into a wider context. 2024 will give us more opportunities to do this under the care of Elaine Saunders whose idea it was to have this celebratory year. I know we will benefit greatly from the events during the year.

January's newsletter includes:

an introduction to the year's celebrations, details of upcoming events, film links, research notes and more.

What to expect in 2024

Looking to the future of the Hertfordshire Association for Local History has involved delving into its past. Hertfordshire Archives holds extensive records from our predecessors, the Hertfordshire Local History Council. Most valuable amongst these is a *Chronological Narrative* of HLHC's first thirty years, written by our own renowned historian, Lionel Munby. In it, Munby draws together the threads of the archive and enlivens his tale with personal anecdotes about fellow historians, and reminiscences from his long service with HLCH.

It's almost as if he knew we would one day go looking!

A new history entitled *From Foundation to Flying Squad: the early years of HALH* accompanies this newsletter, and augments Munby's *Narrative* with other sources and hindsight. Also attached is *How it Began*, personal recollections from W. Branch Johnson, one of our founding historians. If anyone has reminiscences of their own, we'd be very glad to hear them.

Researching our history brought home how much has changed during the seventy-five years since our inception. The typed members' newsletters have been replaced by an academic journal, *Herts Past & Present*, but keeping pace with rising printing and postage costs proves as much of a challenge today. Emails, HALH's website, social media and our winter Zoom lectures have also spread word of Hertfordshire's world-class research to all corners of the globe.*

Much has remained the same, however. HALH still maintains a list of speakers on our website, but the guinea payment suggested in 1951 wouldn't buy a post-talk cup of tea today. We're also consulting with Hertfordshire Archives on ways to preserve historians' research notes, stored on websites and memory sticks, rather than in boxes. Instead of a county bibliography on index cards, we hope to build a digital database of Hertfordshire's research projects.

However, there's still nothing better than meeting in person and we're finding ways to make that happen more often too. In the meantime, members will receive a monthly newsletter, like this one containing snippets of local history and news from museums and heritage projects across the county. Inspired by our predecessors, we're also trialling a query service to gauge interest in a members-only forum on our new website. Please email questions about a particular place or aspect of research to membership@halh.org.uk. We'll circulate your query amongst our members and hopefully put you in touch with the right person or resource to provide an answer.

* For more details of our winter Zoom lectures, and other events, visit our website www.halh.org.uk, or booking agent, www.eventbrite.co.uk

Hertfordshire on film

This month we're with British Pathé in Stevenage.

The first short clip dates from 1946 and covers the residents' objections to the building of the new town. Please get in touch if you recognise any of the people or houses involved.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txHbMusO33o>



As we know, the new-town went ahead, and the results appear in this clip from the late 1950s. If you're one of today's 'citizens of tomorrow', please let us know whether the town centre is still 'refreshingly free from traffic' and has abundant free parking!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNHKzSyliAQ>

What's on in February

Hertfordshire Gardens Trust

Hertfordshire Gardens Trust hosts a talk by Bridget Howlett at Woolmer Green Village Hall on 5 February 2024, 2.30-4pm. The talk entitled *William Wilshere: a Hitchin Lawyer and his garden 1790-1824* is based on his Farm and Gardening Memoranda, 1809 to 1824 and from journals started by his gardener, James Bowie, in 1812. More details at the link below. Booking via Eventbrite.

<https://hertsgardenstrust.org.uk/events/list/>

Frogmore Paper Mill

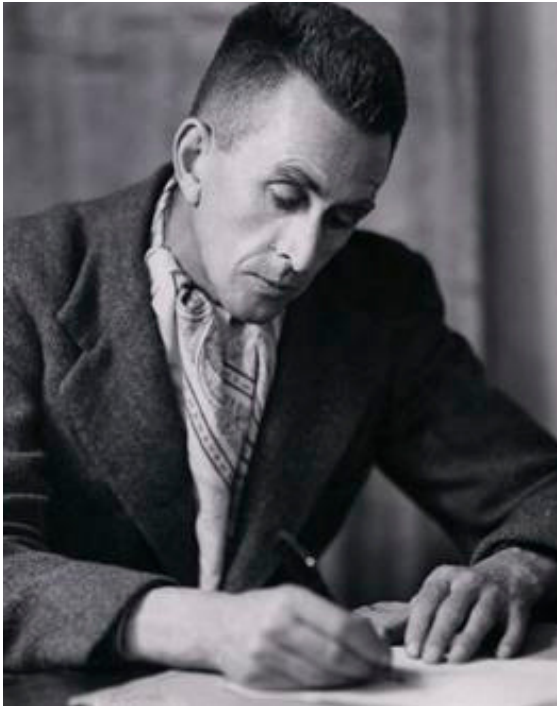
On 2 January 2024 the Apsley mill celebrated 250 years of papermaking. Edward Holme bought the fulling mill in 1774 and turned it to paper production, making handmade paper there fifty years before the first machine arrived in 1803. Sadly, a fire devastated the historic mill, but it reopens in 2024. We'll bring more news later in the year. In the meantime, please visit their extensive website for information on their 250th anniversary, papermaking history and future events. You can sign up for their newsletter at the foot of each page.

<https://frogmorepapermill.org.uk>

The mill also invites you to vote for their entry in the Museum Object of the Year. The poll closes on 5th February 2024.

<https://hertfordshiremuseums.org.uk/object-of-the-year-2024.aspx>

Hertfordshire's literary connections



Margaret Irwin spoke at HLHC's inaugural conference. A noted authority on the Elizabethan and early-Stuart eras, Irwin's novels were commended for the accuracy of their historical research.

The pictured novel, *Young Bess*, is our book of the month and the first in a trilogy about Elizabeth I's early years as a princess, including those spent in captivity at Hatfield House.

It's a torrid tale of her juvenile passion for her stepmother's husband, Thomas Seymour, and was adapted into a film in 1953 starring Jean Simmons and Stewart Grainger.

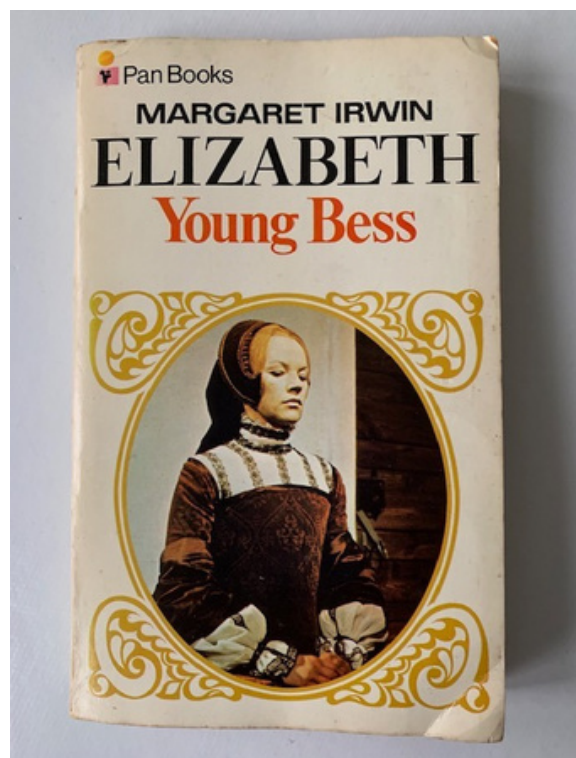
If any member is brave enough to give it a go, contact the membership email to receive this copy for free!

Instead of our usual single author or novel connected with the county, we have two in our first month. Both authors appear in our new history of the Hertfordshire Local History Council.

We begin with Vicars Bell (left) who became the first chairman of HLHC in 1949. He taught at Little Gaddesden Church of England Primary School from 1929 to 1963 and combined teaching with a successful career as an author.

He wrote several children's books and chronicled village life in autobiographical works. His 'competent but not outstanding' detective stories featured a disabled entomologist, Dr Douglas Baynes, who assisted police, but do not appear to have been critically well received.

He was awarded an MBE in 1964



From our members

You'll recall the film in our December newsletter of an Essendon pub's Christmas club payout in 1962. HALH member, Vicki Barton kindly got in touch to say the film rang a bell. From the layout of the bar, Vicki believes it's filmed in the Salisbury Crest beside the church, which closed in the 1980s. At the time, it was considered more upmarket than the nearby Rose & Crown and offered food. The chef appears in the clip. Vicki doesn't recognise anyone but feels sure her late mother would have known them all.

<https://bbcrewind.co.uk/asset/6132291ae5707a0020932924?q=hertfordshire>



The pub featured in a 1968 episode of *The Avengers, Invasion of the Earthmen*. For those old enough to remember the programme, the pub doubled as a hotel used by Steed and Tara when they investigated strange goings on at an Academy for teaching lethal combat to future astronauts. It's now a listed building and private house. More info at the link.

<https://pubshistory.com/HertsPubs/Essendon/SalisburyCrest.shtml>

Research notes

Destruction of original wills

The government has outlined plans to destroy wills submitted in support of probate applications. Currently, paper copies are retained indefinitely, but it is now planned to digitise them and destroy the originals. Only the wills of famous persons will be preserved.

This raises several issues for historians. Often handling the paper document gives a perspective a photograph cannot provide. Secondly, how is 'famous' to be defined? Someone noteworthy today, might not be considered so in a century's time, or an overlooked personage might acquire significance after their will has been disposed of. Finally, analytical and forensic techniques advance daily, so there is no predicting what might be divined from the originals in years to come.

HALH is framing its own response to the proposal, but you can also have your say, and find out more at the following link. The consultation closes on 23 February.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/storage-and-retention-of-original-will-documents>

Research notes continued

The National Archives

The National Archives at Kew has a new exhibition opening on 2 February 2024 – *Great Escapes: Remarkable Second World War Captives*. It tells the stories of prisoners of war and civilian internees during WWII – from escape attempts to the in-camp activities which freed their minds from captivity. The exhibition runs until 21st July. More details at the link below.

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/visit-us/whats-on/exhibitions/great-escapes/>

TNA is also running courses to teach researchers how to use First and Second World War resources: Civilian Internee Records (20 January), Prisoner of War Records (27 January), Second World War Army Records (3 February). Booking through links on the website or via Eventbrite.

Whilst on the website, you'll find a subscription link for the TNA's email newsletter

Hertfordshire Reference Library

Future HALH newsletters contain items on local history taken from reference databases online, many of which are usually hidden behind a paywall. These include newspaper archives, the Dictionary of National Biography and encyclopaedias.

For those of you who aren't aware of it (and we're sure most of you are!), several premium databases can be accessed for free through the Hertfordshire Libraries' website. Follow the link below to see the available titles and type in your library card number when prompted. (You'll usually need to insert numerals only)

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/libraries-and-archives/books-and-reading/reference-library-online/reference-library-online.aspx>

Hertfordshire Buildings Preservation Trust

You'll read about the work of the county buildings trust in the attached history of HLCH. The trust continues although they're now the Buildings Preservation Trust. They too have a newsletter you might find interesting. Instructions on how to subscribe, and details of their current projects, are available at <http://www.hertfordshirebpt.org>.

Photo credits

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- Vicars Bell. National Portrait Gallery and used under academic licence <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw99859/>

And finally...

An anecdote from the HLHC Executive Committee minutes of 1975 gave your membership secretary pause for thought. James Coutts Smith proposed taking a local history display to fetes across the county, hoping to raise the profile of the Hertfordshire Local History Council over the summer and to sell a few of its publications. He came away from Welwyn fete with £13 in book sales and thirty new membership applications. His success astounded him until a gentleman confided that, before meeting Mr Coutts Smith, he had not thought membership of HLHC was open to the general public.

In case anyone is still under this misapprehension, please assure them that HALH, welcomes everyone interested in the history of any place, subject, or era, wherever they live. Most of our members are not academics, and many are not actively researching or writing papers. But we all share an interest in history, through visiting museums, reading about the past or simply taking notice of the history all around us.

Everyone is welcome at our meetings where they'll encounter a friendly like-minded group of people. They can also benefit from reading the articles in our excellent journal, *Herts Past & Present* or enjoy finding out more about the history of the county.

HALH hopes to make 2024 a special year for our members, so why not help us have a bumper year too by encouraging just one extra person to join us? Our very reasonable subscription rates and a membership form are on our website www.halh.org.uk, or can be obtained by emailing membership@halh.org.uk

Also, please feel free to share this newsletter with anyone who might enjoy it.

See you again in February.

Privacy notice - If you do not wish to receive these newsletters, please contact the membership email address above. You will still receive you usual HALH updates.