

Chairman's Report

The Committee of the Society must apologise to members that they have not yet received the latest volume, *Two Nineteenth-Century Hertfordshire Diaries* (Vol. XVIII). This delay has been caused by a variety of factors, not least the pressure work at HALS which has fallen on our editor Susan Flood. The two diaries have required footnotes on the observations on local and national events which in some cases have proved difficult and time consuming to prepare. One diary is by Henry Lomas, a Watford plumber and decorator, writing in the 1820s and the other is by Rev Thomas Newcome, Rector of Shenley, writing between 1830 and 1849. All is now nearly complete and it is expected that the volume will be with you in the near future.

There has been progress in bringing *Bryant's Map of Hertfordshire 1822* to print, which will be sent when ready, without additional charge, to all subscribers to the Society. Scanning has been successfully completed and the discs containing not only Bryant's but other key maps are held in HALS. Estimates for the work have been obtained, and the order for the work has been placed with Stephen Austin of Hertford. Modern technology will mean that the quality of production will be much enhanced over previous similar publications. Bryant's map will be printed on four large sheets to be contained in a printed folder. An index and introduction is being prepared by Richard Busby, David Dean and Alan Ruston, in conjunction with Susan Flood. After Bryant, it is hoped to produce a new print from the discs of *Dury & Andrews' Map of Hertfordshire 1766* with others to follow.

Work is well advanced on the next volume, *Layston Parish Memorandum Book 1607-1647 & 1704-circa 1750*, which is being edited by Dr Stephen Hindle and our secretary Heather Falvey. It is hoped that the volume will be with you towards the end of the year.

Our AGM in 2002 was held on 8 June in the Library of Abbot's Hill School, Hemel Hempstead, the former home of John Dickinson which was followed by a guided tour of the house. Our thanks go to the Governors of the School for their kind hospitality.

Alan Ruston

Volume XIX

Our nineteenth volume, *Layston Parish Memorandum Book, 1607-1747*, edited by Mrs Heather Falvey and Dr Steve Hindle

The parish memorandum book of the Hertfordshire clergymen, Alexander Strange and Thomas Heton, is a remarkable, indeed virtually unique, source for historians of the social, economic and cultural experience of the inhabitants of an English local community from the early seventeenth century to the mid-eighteenth century. Few other documents are as revealing of the social and economic relationships between clergymen and their congregation.

Alexander Strange (rector of Layston c.1607-50) recorded details and opinions on a very wide range of issues of fundamental significance for our understanding of change, conflict and control in local society: the provision of charity in cash and kind; the operation of social welfare under the terms of Elizabethan legislation; the setting of the poor on work; the basis of assessments towards the parish rates; the impact of in-migration; the governance of almshouses. Details of the operation of charity-giving within the parish reveal a telling combination of benevolence and pragmatism. The transcripts of various charitable bequests clearly show how earlier parishioners, in keeping with older religious traditions, made provision for the poor. (Many of these bequests were in the form of land and property which were still being administered on behalf of the poor when the nineteenth-century Charity Commissioners made their report.) On the other hand, Strange made collection of the benefits of these bequests dependant on the recipients attending divine service on Sunday. Nowhere was this specified in the original grants but an analysis of the dates on which the doles were made shows that they were all Sundays. Strange's own attitude towards the poor is most clearly displayed in his 'address', which takes up 13 pages in the Memorandum Book. Dr Steve Hindle has discussed this address at length in his article 'Exclusion Crises: Poverty, migration and parochial Responsibility in English Rural Communities, c.1560-1660' (*Rural History*, 1996). It seems likely that the address's intended audience was the members of the parish vestry, some of whom were apparently guilty of allowing

poor migrants to reside in properties within the town and subsequently become a charge on the parish's poor rates.

Other subjects recorded by Strange include donations towards the maintenance of St Peter's Chapel, which he had caused to be built in the centre of Buntingford to facilitate access to a place of worship in the town. The original parish church of St Bartholomew was situated on the other side of the River Rib, which frequently flooded, and the earlier chapel of St John within the town had become dilapidated. The parish frequently encountered problems with the maintenance of the bridge over the Rib and various disputes as to parish rates levied for repairs to it are recorded. In 1642 Strange transcribed the text of the Protestation Oath. This was an oath of loyalty, ostensibly to the King, but in fact to Parliament, which was administered to all adult males. The surviving returns listing all those who took the oath, parish by parish, are preserved in the House of Lords Record Office. Since, unfortunately, the Hertfordshire returns have not survived, it is all the more frustrating that Strange, an inveterate recorder of parish minutiae, did not see fit to follow his transcript with a list of the oath-takers. However, the first entry by Thomas Heton (rector c.1704-1747) is 'The names of the present inhabitants of the Town of Buntingford & Parish of Layston', dated 27 May 1704.

Heton too shows great concern for the correct administration of poor relief in the parish and takes it upon himself to make detailed transcripts of all the parish's charities. He makes notes from earlier records on the establishment of Bishop Ward's almshouses, as well as noting the changes in personnel of the Feoffees (trustees) during his incumbency. It is clear that he encountered resistance from various parishioners regarding the payment of tithes because he made exhaustive comments on the customary allocation and collection of tithe payments. Heton himself had an obvious interest in astronomical phenomena on which he made extensive notes from a wide variety of reference books. Exactly where he read these books is unclear but as he was a Cambridge M.A. he would have had access to such books at the University. (The editors have managed to locate contemporary copies of most of Heton's sources in the Cambridge University Library.)

Although historians of Hertfordshire will find much of local interest here in the intimate disclosure of detail on life in the market town of Buntingford and in its contiguous parishes of Layston, Aspenden, Throcking and Wyddial, the document is of far wider significance. It makes possible the analysis of the politics of the parish, and especially the politics of poor relief and custom, in a way that is only

paralleled by the fullest of vestry books, themselves a very rare source for this period. When linked to other local sources, especially the parish registers which contain Strange's own annotations on the social status of those he baptised, married and buried, and his unpublished sermons which offer critiques of contemporary social mores, the memorandum book will be an indispensable research tool for local and social historians alike.

The editors have not only transcribed and introduced this document, but also collated and cross referenced material which is, in the original manuscript, haphazardly organised.

Heather Falvey

HRS Annual General Meeting & visit

This year our Annual General Meeting will be held at St Peter's Church, Buntingford, on Saturday 14th June, commencing at 2:30pm.

At the conclusion of business Mr Philip Plumb will show us around the church. This will provide a particularly happy opportunity to visit a building strongly associated with our autumn volume (see Heather Falvey's preview, above).

St Peter's Church is a Grade I listed building and has been described as 'An unusual Jacobean town preaching house in Greek cross form'. It is arguably unique in this country. Its stark, Gothic Survival style was undermined by a first rebuilding, but largely restored, within the limits of modern demands, by a second rebuilding.

Buntingford is a small market town on the main road from London to Cambridge. It is based on four parishes and its first recorded mention is in 1185. The church of St Bartholomew, at Layston, had for some hundreds of years been the main parish church, but seems to have been superseded by the less remote, but now lost, chapel of St John the Baptist. By the early 17th century this chapel was dilapidated. Its vicar, Alexander Strange, taking as his motto 'Beg-hard or beggard' persuaded his congregation to contribute towards a new Chapel-of-Ease to be located in the centre of town, at the south end of the market place.

The cost of the new building was £418 10s.1d. On the east wall, high up, is a stone with the legend 'Domus Orationis 1615' - the House of Prayer - and it is thought that in that year an oblong building facing east was first used. Later the north and south transepts were added and finally an apse was built on to the south transept.

Thus the communion table was at the south end of the building rather than at the east as was the tradition for the stone altars of pre-Reformation churches. As Alexander Strange was a Puritan, and probably a Calvinist as well (judging by the allegiance of some of his friends), this was almost certainly a deliberate rejection of the Roman practice.

A brass plate in a wooden frame, hanging in the church, shows Strange preaching to his congregation in 1620. Some are sitting in pews, some standing in the aisle. A few of the women are wearing 'Mary Stewart' bonnets, but the majority have high round hats with broad brims. The men wear short cloaks and loose breeches, fastened at the knee and have the same shaped hats as the women. All have the ruff of the early years of James I. The minister wears a loose gown and holds a Bible: at his left side stands a large hour-glass to remind him when his sermon should finish (although many Puritan divines gave sermons two glasses long - listening to sermons was very popular then).

Strange, according to an inscription in Greek at the bottom of this plate, was little of stature, but eminently great in strength and mind.

Alexander Strange died in 1650, beloved of his parishioners and remembered for his peace making between disputants as well as his vigorous ministry. He was eighty and towards the end needed help from others to officiate at divine service.

The chapel he left behind him, suitably endowed, was a substantial (and neat according to Fuller) red-brick building in English-bond with steep tiled roofs. In Greek cross form, the chancel and semi-circular apse were at the south end while on the north end were two small towers. The tall moulded brick windows with blunt pointed heads were in moulded arched recesses of similar pattern. On the north face was one large window flanked by two smaller, narrow ones and the main door was set centrally below the large window. In the upper part of the west gable were two small pointed lights. The roofs had gable parapets with moulded copings and small pointed turrets on each gable corner. Above the roof of the apse was a large sundial.

The apse itself had west, south and east small windows. A west door was flanked by two small low windows. In the main east window was a stained glass heraldic display erected in 1622 by the son and daughter of a former vicar, Lewis Reynolds, who had been instituted on 1st October 1572 (under the patronage of Queen Elizabeth I) and who died in 1588. In the north window were four coats of arms including the same shield with three

Rooks proper, each holding a feather in its beak as in the Reynolds emblem.

The flattened barrel-vaulted roof ran from east to west against which short similar vaulted roofs abutted to the north and south. The timber ceiling had heavy cambered hollow-chamfered tie-beams with hollow-chamfered braces rising from wall posts on corbels, two to each arm of the church. There was a pointed arch of two chamfered orders into the apse. A wooden gallery across the west arm of the church was carried on four wooden Ionic columns with tall pedestals.

With thanks to Philip Plumb, from whose book, *St Peter's Church, Buntingford*, most of the information was taken.

So where have all the transcripts Gone?

When we published our first volume in 1985, there were a number of dedicated amateur and professional historians around the county busily transcribing documents. Some went on to have their work published, but what of the others who slipped out of sight?

There is a wealth of material in private hands, and a variety of repositories, which cries out for recognition and wider access. What of the Chatsworth Cartulary or the Webster Journal at the Society of Antiquaries?

We receive a steady trickle of suggestions, but would be delighted to consider the work of other individuals or groups whose activity is likely to come to fruition within the next few years.

Prospective members, hasten to page 4

In a move to increase awareness and support for our activities we are extending our Newsletter circulation and devoting the last page to a membership application and a list of our wares. A number of our early volumes are now out of print, but appear on the second-hand market, albeit at somewhat inflated prices. We try to hold a few copies of each volume, but storage space is at a premium.

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