

Chairman's Report

The Society sent out two publications to members within the last year. Volume XIX ('This Little Commonwealth': Layston Parish Memorandum Book 1607-1647 and 1704-c.1747) and Dury & Andrews Map of Hertfordshire 1766. The transcription edited by Heather Falvey and Steve Hindle has been described as almost the ideal type of publication for a county Record Society to produce, and we hope that members felt that it was well worth waiting for. We are also grateful to Philip Plumb and Mark Bailey for their input into the creation of this volume.

The continuing sales of Bryant's Hertfordshire map 1822, our first venture in this field, have meant that it had to be reprinted. This success encouraged the Society to publish a much larger map (9 Sheets), again in association with Hertfordshire Record Office on nine sheets, first published by Andrew Dury & John Andrews in 1766, again in association with Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (HALS). Hertfordshire Publications produced a version of this map in book form in 1980 which has long been out of print. Our presentation, with an introduction plus indexes to both places and landowners, has been copied digitally and is of a high standard of definition. It is a handsome addition to our list of publications.

Kate Thompson's transcription of Julian Grenfell's letters is expected to be published in time for the ninetieth anniversary of his death in May 2005. Killed while serving as a soldier in France, there is considerable interest in the letters of this significant poet. The volume will not necessarily contain all the letters located in the Panshanger Collection at HALS, and it is hoped those not published here will subsequently be made available to researchers.

Further volumes are in the course of preparation, and the Society will maintain its promise which I gave in my report in 2004 that members will receive a volume each year. It is possible that a particular volume, produced in our traditional colours, may appear a little late on occasions but you can be assured that it will arrive eventually. Every so often there will be the added bonus of an additional publication.

Last year our annual general meeting took place in the magnificent setting of Taplow Court in Berkshire. After our meeting was over we were given a guided tour of the house and gardens located in one of most beautiful parts of that county. A detailed description of Taplow Court was given in our Spring 2004 Newsletter, and we are grateful to Soka Gakkai International for allowing us

to visit the former home of Lord and Lady Desborough, whose surname was of course Grenfell. While at Taplow we saw the memorial to Julian Grenfell in the gardens. Taplow Court may well figure again in the events associated with the publication of the Grenfell letters.

Alan Ruston

Forthcoming Volume XXI

The Hellard Almshouses and other Stevenage charities, 1482 – 2005, edited by Margaret Ashby

In Church Lane, Old Stevenage, is a row of unpretentious cottages with a history reaching back to the 15th century. These are the Stevenage Almshouses, also known as the Hellard Almshouses, after their founder, Rector Stephen Hellard. According to the *Alumni Cantabrigiensis* Stephen Hellard was a member of Cambridge University, graduating as a Bachelor of Law in the year 1474-75. It is also suggested that he was 'Perhaps Doctor of Canon Law in 1492' but in his will he claims only to hold the degree of Bachelor of Arts. His date of birth is not given, but he is recorded as being 'of Yorkshire.' He was probably Rector of Upminster, Essex, from 1470 to 1472, after which, on 3rd July 1472, he was installed as Rector of Stevenage and lived there until his death in 1506. He was, however, also a prebendary of St Asaph's cathedral, which may have involved him in occasional residence there.

Stephen Hellard died in 1506, leaving in his will a legacy to the town of All Christian Souls House, 'which house I have built for the habitation of three poor folk without any rent therefore to be paid so long as the said house does or shall endure'. Since then, the Almshouse Trust has continued and is still in operation today. The foundation will be 500 years old next year, 2006.

Although the Almshouse Charity came into being on Hellard's death in 1506 and is remembered by its founder's name, in fact many other people were also involved, and preparations for setting up an almshouse in Stevenage had begun some 25 years earlier. On the Feast of St Dunstan the Archbishop, in the 21st year of the reign of King Edward the fourth after the Conquest of England [ie May 19th 1482], three men signed a covenant. They were John Hykman of St Albans, Thomas Gynne of Stevenage and John Huckle, a fuller, also of Stevenage and they were agreeing to transfer to Stephen Hellard, Rector of Stevenage, Walter Smyth, a chaplain, and William Grene, a pightle of

land at Woolenwick Green, called Gleviscroft. This, with other properties as they were added, provided income from rents, for the charitable trust to use on building and maintaining the almshouses.

Through succeeding centuries the leases for these lands recorded the names of trustees and tenants and incidentally revealed useful snippets of information about the history of Stevenage. For example, a lease document of 1668 gives the names of the trustees as George Banister, George Nodes and Ginnings Chapman, all gentlemen, John Hitchin the elder, butcher, Robert Heath the elder and Robert Heath the younger, and Edward and John Nash, yeomen. The tenants were William Rumbold the elder and younger, neither of whom could write, but who made their marks on the deed. The property being let and the terms of the lease are described in great detail.

It is clear that by the mid-18th century the affairs of a number of other small local charities were also being managed by the Hellard Almshouse trustees and records show several attempts at clarification. Churchwarden Rowland Berkeley's book, dated 1855, contains long lists of people entitled to receive help in money or other kind. It also includes records of the timber-framed former workhouse at 2, Letchmore Road, which had been acquired by the parish in 1773, but had become redundant in 1836, after the new Union workhouse was built at Hitchin. The Stevenage building continued in the ownership of the parish until 1957, when the decision was made to sell it.

The Stevenage Consolidated Charities Trust was formed in 1909, to manage the affairs of the Hellard Almshouses and eight other small charities. In 1946 the village of Shephall, some 3 miles south of the town, was included within the designated area for development and subsequently became, like Old Stevenage itself, a 'neighbourhood' of the New Town. Shephall's charities were then added to those of Stevenage and are also administered under the Stevenage Consolidated Charities Trust. All documents dating from before 1909 have been transferred to the Hertfordshire Record Office. Subsequent documents, including a complete run of minutes from 1909 to the present day, are held by the Trustees at Stevenage.

Volume 21, to be published by The Hertfordshire Record Society in November, will contain transcripts of all manuscript documents dating from 1482 to approximately 1940 and summaries of significant events between 1940 and 2005, such as sales of land and plans for improvements to the almshouses. Some 20th century records will necessarily be omitted to avoid embarrassment to descendants of persons mentioned. The records of the Hellard Almshouses and other Stevenage charities include names and occupations of many townfolk, not only trustees but also the poor and other inhabitants and give an insight into the financial management of such institutions. Their

details of land holdings are particularly important in Stevenage, where the development of the New Town has obliterated so much of the ancient landscape and its connections with the past. For example, the 'Almshouse lands' documents of the 16th and 17th centuries pinpoint exactly when the name of the lost Domesday manor of 'Woolenwick' changed to 'Symonds Green', the name by which it is known today.

The Trust's archive is a rich and previously untapped source for research into the community of Stevenage and its surrounding district, which this publication will make more accessible both to local historians and those from further afield with an interest in charities and poor relief.

Margaret Ashby

AGM venue 11th June 2205 Springfield House, Old Stevenage

This year's AGM will be held at Springfield House, which stands at the north end of Stevenage High Street, facing the Bowling Green. Little is known about the early history of the house, but in 1884 it was bought by the Reverend John Osborne Seager, headmaster of the Grange Preparatory School opposite. He rebuilt and extended it and when he died in 1889 his son, John Lingen Seager, took over both the family house and the headmastership of the Grange School.

The Seagers left Springfield in the 1890s, after which there were various changes of ownership and tenancy until in 1922 it was sold to millionaire Jeremiah Inns, a local man who, like his father before him, had made his money by hard work and shrewd business deals. After the death of his greatly-loved first wife Mary in 1935, he married again. His second wife, the former Helen Walker, was given a free hand to refurbish the house to the highest standards and the remains of her work are visible in the building today. Of particular interest are features such as doors, fire surrounds and skirting boards which came from the Adelphi Terrace in London when it was demolished and its contents sold in 1936.

On the death of Jeremiah Inns in 1946 the house was left to his widow for her lifetime and then to be used by the town as a cottage hospital, but by the time she died in 1968 the National Health Service had made cottage hospitals a thing of the past. After many debates and deliberations Springfield House eventually became the Old Stevenage Community Centre, where a range of activities take place, from senior citizens' lunches to local history lectures to children's playgroups. The first floor of the building is largely leased to the Stevenage Artists' Co-operative and regular art exhibitions are held there. Users of the house also have access to the garden.

Margaret Ashby

Dury & Andrews Map of Hertfordshire, 1766

Once again the HRS, in collaboration with the Record Office, have re-published an historic county map. Copies should have been received by all current members of the Society. Further copies are available to members at a cost of £6+pp (£2.50) and to non members, from HALS, priced £8.50+pp.

The Dury & Andrews map of the county, dated 1766, has been republished as a matching companion to the Bryant map of 1820-21. Both are supplied in similar attractive folders. On the back of these are short biographies of the cartographers, written by Alan Ruston. An index has been produced by members of the Committee and Susan Flood has overseen production as General Editor. We hope you like the result. The production of these maps has, for the first time in some years, seen an increase in the membership of the Society.

It is of some interest to compare the two maps; to determine whether and to what extent they compliment each other or merely provide an alternative choice. As mentioned in the last *Newsletter*, maps are diagrams making use of commonly understood drawing conventions. They are not aerial photographs. What they portray and how they portray it differs from one map to another and depends upon the purpose for which the map is drawn and the skill and conventions of the cartographer.

Our two maps of 1820 and 1766 are different. The 1820 map is reproduced on four folded sheets of A1 paper, nominally at a scale of 1.5 inches to the mile, but in fact only 1.25 inches. The 1766 map is reproduced on nine similar sized sheets at 1.95 inches to the mile. The differences of scale considerably eases examination of the latter with the unaided eye. Both maps use an old convention for showing ground contours, by shading steep slopes. This is a somewhat subjective convention. It is used more extensively on the 1766 map and tends to dominate.

Both maps show estates, parkland and wooded areas. Additionally the 1766 map is covered in fields, though these are largely fictitious. It does show and name a greater number of hamlets and occasionally names estate and farm holders. Both maps show parish boundaries, but the 1766 version does so with less accuracy. It does however precede its companion map by some 54 years. The 1820 map is plotted with greater accuracy, though at a smaller and arguably less convenient scale.

Both maps are better reproduced than in previous reproductions, The 1820 version does not fully exploit the potential of digital enhancement, the background being less than 'white'. The 1766 version is clear and bright and lends itself to the roads being highlighted with a yellow fluorescent marker, without preventing subsequent photocopying of areas of interest.

I would not wish to be without either of these maps. They span a period which marked an increase in both population size and migration. They also promise the opportunity for considerable further scrutiny and discovery.

What next? Scanning technology offers greater opportunity for reproducing large maps. Consideration is being given to what might further be done in this respect to aid Hertfordshire's historians. We are looking at the value of reproducing selected town plans. Those of St Albans and Hitchin, 1822; St Albans and Hertford, 1766; Barnet, from its enclosure map of 1818; Watford, 1849 and Hoddesdon, 1850, from Tregelle's *History of Hoddesdon*.

We would appreciate your comments and suggestions. Many little known manuscripts are still to be found around the country. Please let us know what you would like to see us do.

David Dean

Reviews

1. Edited extract from an article by Oliver Phillips, in the *Watford Observer*.

Watford Reference Library lost Judith Knight, but the loss to Watford's history has been some-what mitigated by the publication this month of a book she has co-edited with county archivist Susan Flood.

Titled *Two Nineteenth Century Hertfordshire Diaries (1822-1849)*, the book has a general appeal but particularly to this area in respect of the diaries of Henry Lomas, a literate and opinionated man, who was a painter and decorator in the locality.

The diary gives a marvellous insight into local and national events, scandals, murders and developments.

Henry Lomas's diary reflections, superbly annotated, give us a taste of life in Watford some 180 years ago.

As well as noting the developments and improvements within the area, our Henry had a taste for gossip and a fascination for accidents, such as the one which befell a young girl in Bushey when she was killed after being knocked down by a cart — the wheels passing over her neck.

We learn that in June 1822, the temperature was 115 degrees and the harvest was all in by the end of July; Watford beat Windsor twice at cricket; there was the suicide of a Rose and Crown waiter who was found hanging from a tree in the Earl of Essex's Park and there are details of the widening of Loates Lane.

There is various news of deportations to Australia for sundry criminal offences and the

fate of a 14-year-old girl, working at Rookery Silk Mills, who caught her clothes on a machine, was dragged into it and crushed to death.

There are observations on the machinations of parliament, national calamities and military operations abroad.

It is a wonderful book, with Judith having put in some painstaking research for the informative footnotes, which do enhance the appreciation of the text.

The irony is that if she had not taken early retirement, Judith Knight, would not have had the time to transcribe the diaries, bringing more of the history of Watford us all.

2 Edited extracted from an article by Philip W Plumb, Buntingford Journal, Dec. 2004 – Jan. 2005, Volume 29, No. 10

"This Little Commonwealth": Layston Parish Memorandum Book 1607-c.1650 & 1704-c.1747.
Edited by Heather Falvey & Steve Hindle with a contribution by Philip Plumb and Foreword by Mark Bailey.

Thanks to this new book from the Hertfordshire Record Society we can now read about when the Manor House, home of the Town Council, was the Kings Head Inn; of Alexander Strange, the Vicar of Layston and founder of St. Peter's, scolding the principal inhabitants of the parish for their covetousness, accusing the parishes of Aspenden and Wyddial of exporting their poor to Layston to become dependent on the parish charities and poor rates: and suggesting that the parish should communally buy up houses not owned by parishioners to prevent landlords letting them to the 'unruly poor'.

Alexander Strange started to keep a memorandum book in 1607 and continued it until his death in 1650. Succeeding incumbents added nothing but the Rev. Thomas Heaton, vicar 1703-1748, took over the recording of much important parish business during his 45 years in the town.

It remained with the parish records until 1973 and was then deposited in the Hertfordshire Record Office where it was found to contain many interesting entries.

So what were Alexander Strange's concerns other than the treatment of the poor? In his time, as the map forming the endpapers of the book shows, Layston parish encompassed Berkesden Green, Corneybury, Beauchamps and Moles Lane and other parts of what is now Wyddial, part of Hare Street and land surrounding but not including Stonebury. The parish thus included what were known as the uplands and the upland men were the owners or tenants of Corneybury.

Beauchamps and Alswick Hall. Strange spent much effort in sorting out the acreage of each estate and therefore the amount of rates due. Problems arose because due to the location of their lands, the uplanders did not receive the benefit of all the parish's facilities. As today, the upkeep of the chapel and furnishings were of continuing concern and in 1628 Strange recorded a 'voluntary Contribution for the taking out and Laying up of the Service bookes & Keeping clean of the Chappell' to be paid quarterly. Amongst the 15 names is John Ward, Seth's Father. There are also much longer lists of contributors to the repair and maintenance of the chapel and town clocks (which I have used in earlier articles in the Journal).

The parish was so large and unwieldy that the perambulation of the boundaries of the parish that took place regularly took two days to complete. The boundaries between Layston and Wyddial parishes were so interwoven that differences arose between them. To illustrate this, transcripts of the earliest known perambulations of both are included in this book dating from 1591 for Layston and 1708 for Wyddial. These accounts are full of place and field names many still used today, such as Capons Wood and the Chillow Hills, and others less familiar like Howersley Valley and Brunsell Field. The 1591 perambulation confirms that St. Peter's was as not the first chapel of ease in Layston and that another chapel existed. possibly on the same site before St. Peter's.

Details are given of the various charities operating in the parish, such as those of Henry Skynner, Sir John Watts, John Brograve, Joan Sandbach (whose charity was consistently distributed to the poor of Wyddial parish who lived in Buntingford. rather than those of Aspenden who had been specified in her will - another result of the complicated boundaries). The foundation of the Almshouses is covered and there are lists of the residents at various times and details of Bishop Ward's other charities.

Illustrations in colour are a fine reproduction of the brass in St. Peter's showing Strange preaching to his congregation in 1620 and a plan of the town of Buntingford in 1838 at the time of the tithe award. Other pictures show St. Peter's, Layston Church, the Almshouses, the Grammar School, Corneybury, Alswick Hall, and Owles, all in the 1830s and 40s and Beauchamps in the early twentieth century.

Heather Falvey has provided many notes to explain and amplify the contents of the Memorandum Book. Also included are the parish registers 1604-1650, various wills, and the text of a sermon Strange preached at Hertford on 4th March. 1607.

Contributions or comments may be sent to 175
Verulam Road St Albans AL3 4DW or
david-ann@ver175.wanadoo.co.uk