

## Chairman's Report

This year saw a successful visit, courtesy of Lafarge, to the Panshanger estate. This was a joint visit with the Hertfordshire Association for Local History and was followed by HALH's summer garden party and our AGM. All those who attended from enjoyed their visit despite the rather inclement weather. Our thanks are extended to Linda Adams of HALH and Tewin for organizing the catering.

Our General Editor, Sue Flood, announced her retirement as the County Archivist this spring, but said she hoped to continue her work with local organizations. We hope very much that her role with the Society continues as she has provided invaluable service to our authors over the years. Our Treasurer, Mrs Gwynneth Grimwood, has announced her desire to give up the post (in 2014) after 12 years' meticulous work for the Society. The successful condition of the Society's bank balances speaks volumes for her hard work. Our thanks are extended to Jane Walker, who has taken over responsibility for the book stock and its distribution. We welcomed the new Hertfordshire Heritage Manager, Julie Gregson to the October meeting of the Trustees (Executive Committee) and look forward to meeting the new County Archivist when appointed.

The text of *Baroness Elizabeth Dimsdale's Receipt Book*, the volume for 2012/13, has been sent to the printer and should be available at the AGM. This year's volume will be *Norton Manorial Court Records*. We also hope to catch up by publishing Part I of *John Carrington's Diary*. Our books were reviewed in a different publication this year, the Royal Horticultural Society printing a notice of Volume XXVII, *Humphry Repton's Red Books*, in its journal *The Garden*. As a result of problems over the printing of this volume, the Trustees have decided to revert to one of the Society's earlier printers, Stephen Austin of Hertford, for the next two volumes.

The Society is grateful to HALS for its continued support, notably by acting as a location for the selling of the Society's books, and by providing a venue for the Trustees' meetings. We are also pleased to note that Hertfordshire Publications, the imprint of HALH & the University of Hertfordshire, will soon be publishing *A Caring Community*, a set of essays about Hertfordshire from the late sixteenth to the twentieth century. Bishops Stortford Museum has received Heritage Lottery funding to digitize nineteenth-century police records for the area and it is pleasing that the publication of local sources is expanding rather than contracting. 2013-14 should therefore be a bumper year for local history publications.

**Alan Thomson**

## Visit to Panshanger

As mentioned above, in a new venture, members of the Society were able to join members of HALH on a visit to the Panshanger estate. The weather was not very kind, with a series of heavy showers, but after an introductory talk about the site we set off to explore the estate. The foundations of the house are still visible, so it was possible to gain an impression of its size, and the view over the grounds towards the Broadwater was impressive, even on a grey, damp day – what must it have been like on a fine summer's evening?

A walk through the surrounding wood took us past the remains of the orangery, still standing but looking gaunt and derelict, to a rather magnificent oak tree which is much older than Repton's planting. From there we retraced our steps, pausing to look at a remnant of the gardens. Once back at the former stables, wellies and waterproofs were returned to our cars and a convoy set off for Tewin and an enjoyable lunch with the members of HALH as - rather than enjoying the planned summer garden party - we watched the rain over the cricket pitch. The joint proceedings closed with talks on Repton's landscape and the Desborough family.

**Peter Elliott**



*View of the Broadwater at Panshanger from the site of the house. Photograph by courtesy of Anne Rowe.*

## AGM Venue

The papers for this year's AGM are distributed with this newsletter. In keeping with our tradition of holding the AGM in a location associated with the current year's volume, we are visiting Norton. After the AGM there will be a guided walk around medieval Norton. Among other features we will see the moated manor house of Nortonbury, the Norman church of St Nicholas, the central core of the village and sites where abandoned house structures have been found.

## **Forthcoming Volume**

Volume XXIX, *Norton Manorial Court Records under the Liberty of St Albans (1244-1539)*

The medieval court books of the manor of Norton comprise a remarkable sequence of records which runs from 1244 to 1460, with only six missing years. They have been translated for this volume and assembled with the surviving rolls from the post-1460 period up to the dissolution of St Albans Abbey.

In about 1350 the administrators of the abbey's estates began to copy their manorial court records because the originals had become increasingly difficult to consult in matters of precedent. The resulting records, nowadays referred to as court books, form a unique collection, most of which are held today in Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies. Court books from a number of the abbey's other manors have survived, such as those of Barnet, Hexton and Codicote, as well as those from Norton.

Medieval manor courts dealt with a wide range of business and therefore the Norton court records provide numerous details relating to such matters as the performance of feudal obligations and the enforcement of local customary law, the latter allowing insights into minor misdemeanours committed in the manor. Furthermore, the court rolls and books also recorded transfers of property holdings, often on the death of a tenant. The Norton records suggest that on average 3 tenants died each year, but in 1349 at least 27 tenants are known to have died, probably from the Black Death. Most of the characters appearing in the courts were ordinary village folk, and so the records allow glimpses into the lives of people who rarely feature in other medieval records.

As well as an analysis of how the manor functioned, including the agricultural system and its produce, the Introduction provides brief biographies of some of the tenants and discusses relations with the emerging town of Baldock, population trends, the role of women and children, the church and the clergy. Perhaps most intriguingly, through analysis of the incidence of fines and amerancements, the records chart the gradual demise of the feudal system. The final series of rolls from 1530 start to give us a flavour of the emerging early modern period.

Compiled by the Norton Community Archaeology Group (NCAG), the translation has been provided by Peter Foden and funded by generous grants from the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, the Heritage Lottery Fund and North Hertfordshire District Council. The NCAG, which boasts over 150 members, was established in 2006 to investigate the archaeology of the historic parish, now part of Letchworth Garden City. The Historical Documents section of NCAG, a group of about 20 contributors,

has written the lengthy Introduction to the book and compiled indexes of places, persons and subjects.

The Group has made a number of archaeological discoveries including in 2009 a possible medieval building platform and the remains of demolished cob walls. This and other findings are discussed in the book in the context of entries in the court records.

The NCAG aims to translate and transcribe all of Norton's manorial court records from 1244-1916. In order to make the medieval records in this important collection more widely available through publication, the group has worked in partnership with the Hertfordshire Record Society.

**David Croft**

## **Reviews of Volume XXVII *Humphrey Repton's Red Books for Panshanger and Tewin Water***

**From the British Association for Local History:** Humphry Repton (1752-1818) was the most influential landscape designer and 'improver' of his generation. His proposals for improvements were incorporated in illustrated volumes which, from their red leather binding, have become known as 'Red Books'. Most of these are in private hands, and only a few have been published in their entirety. It was therefore an admirable idea of the Hertfordshire Record Society to publish in a single volume these two splendid examples of Repton's work.

The neighbouring Hertfordshire estates of Panshanger and Tewin Water were owned by the Earls Cowper, and the family possessed all the land along the Mimram valley from Welwyn to Hertford. In 1799 the 5th Earl took up residence at Panshanger, while a cousin, Henry Cowper, was living at Tewin Water. Both men commissioned Repton to submit plans for redesigning and improving the landscape of their estates, including the building of a new mansion at Panshanger. The Red Books which resulted from these commissions not only provide details of Repton's schemes involving major landscape transformation, but also include much detail on his general ideas and his views on the principles of landscape design. Most of the proposals for landscape improvements along the Mimram valley were carried out. The new mansion was built and a massive programme of excavation, creation of lakes, tree-planting, public road diversion and demolition of unsightly farm buildings was undertaken. Sadly, only part survives, since the estates were broken up during the twentieth century. Those sections which remain, especially at Panshanger, provide an indication of one of Repton's finest schemes.

The costs of so much work and the labour involved in landscaping, building work, planting and water management must have been formidable. At Tewin Water even mature trees were repositioned in order to break up the existing straight avenues, and six miles

of public roads and footpaths were diverted. As well as providing detailed suggestions and illustrations for the improvement of his clients' estates, Repton also used the Red Books to promote his theories on design and the placement of features such as lakes, trees, shrubs, flower-gardens and temples. At Panshanger these principles included paying due attention to 'Comfort, Convenience, Utility and Magnificence', while at the same time ensuring that 'every advantage should be taken of the natural beauties of the situation'.

This is a beautifully-produced volume with expertly photographed full-colour illustrations and with an informative, clearly written introduction by Twigs Way. The Red Books have been reproduced in facsimile with the fine script which Repton employed together with his sketches and watercolours. Repton's ingenious 'before' and 'after' views, demonstrated by hinged inserts in his illustrations, have been photographed separately and are displayed on adjacent pages. The book will be of interest to anyone concerned with the history of landscape design, gardens, and the major influence which Repton had on the development of aesthetic taste and the appreciation of natural beauty.

**Joseph Bettey**

**From *The Georgian*:**

Humphry Repton always saw himself as the successor to Capability Brown, and the frontispiece to this volume quotes Repton's own encomium:

'... it is rather upon my opinions in writing than on the partial and imperfect manner in which my plans have been executed that I wish my fame to be established...'

Each of his commissions was written up as a Red Book (from its Morocco binding) containing plans and watercolours of his proposals, together with a supporting text that explained and justified his vision. It seems very likely that the recipients of his proposals were more interested in his inspiringly memorable watercolours of their parks (together with their ingenious flaps to show the 'before' and the 'after') than in his rather laboured and self-seeking explanatory words. But this does not detract from the overwhelming engagement of both the finished document or from the effect on the ground when his plans were implemented.

This facsimile of Repton's Red Books for Tewin Water and Panshanger in Hertfordshire, with a scholarly introduction by Twigs Way, is published by the Hertfordshire Record Society with the support of the Hertfordshire Gardens Trust. The houses, gardens and parks depicted here, almost filling the whole of the valley of the River Mimram between Welwyn and Hertford, have suffered the ravages of time and development. Tewin Water is now divided into flats

with other houses in the gardens and park, while Panshanger was demolished in 1952. Despite its current ownership by gravel extractors, though, a large part of Repton's landscape has survived. Twigs Way quotes Pevsner in her introduction:

'... the views from the North of the valley past the trees down to the series of lakes created by a widening of the River Mimram are still superb ... [and it remains] ... one of Repton's most perfect schemes...'

This reproduction of the Red Books for two places belonging to different branches of the Cowper family is important in disseminating the actuality of Repton's work and adds to the various biographies of Repton: the first, groundbreaking work by Dorothy Stroud in 1962 and a masterly exposition by Professor Stephen Daniels in 1999.

Until now, the only Red Books in the public domain in their entirety have been those produced by the Basilisk Press in the 1970s (covering Antony in Cornwall, Attingham in Shropshire and Sheringham in Norfolk) and Stephen Daniels' publication of Brandsbury (Middlesex) and Glemham Hall (Suffolk) in the 1990s. To have the twin landscapes of Panshanger and Tewin Water joining these in print will be a useful resource for both garden historians and for the ordinary reader seeking real enjoyment in seeing these landscapes through Repton's eyes. But what a shame that with all our modern technology we cannot reproduce Repton's ingenious system of revealing his visionary schemes by the simple method of folding back a flap.

**Richard Wheeler**

**From *Historic Gardens Review*:**

To persuade a client to go ahead with his often expensive projects Humphry Repton (1752-1818) would produce watercolour pictures of the estate, showing how the landscape looked now and how it might look following his suggestions. The 'before' and 'after' effect was achieved by means of paper flaps, showing the transformation, which were folded down on top of a picture of the existing view to demonstrate how marvellous this could become if Repton's plans were executed.

The watercolours were bound up (usually in red leather), a persuasive introduction was added by Repton, and the resulting 'Red Book' presented to the client, to be considered and perhaps acted upon. Only about half of the 400 or so Red Books prepared by Repton survive and, obviously, they are very fragile. Although of immense use to historians, it would be impossible to allow the overlays to be manipulated by everyone who would like to study them.

So how to reproduce for general use something that was intended as the most limited of editions?

Catherine Cormery, brave owner of niche publisher *Connaissance et Memoires* ([www.connaissance-memoires.fr](http://www.connaissance-memoires.fr)) has chosen the path of total reproduction, flaps and all, for a sumptuous new edition of Repton's *Sketches and hints on landscape gardening* (1794). Handling it and moving the flaps up and down is a wonderful experience; but the €600 price tag is beyond most pockets, and purists will wince at the perpetration of "Humphrey" on the beautiful red binding.

The Hertfordshire Record Society, as custodian of two Red Books, has adopted a different path to use its limited means to best effect by reproducing the 'before' and 'after' pages separately. Although one cannot be superimposed on the other, both can be studied.

It was also decided to amalgamate the two Red Books, as they are for adjoining properties in Hertfordshire, Panshanger and Tewin Water, which belonged to the 5th Earl Cowper and his distant cousin, Henry Cowper. The plans Repton submitted in 1799 were indeed carried out but, sadly, most of the landscape has now been lost - which makes the evidence of the Red Books even more valuable.

**Sarah-Jane Orsett**

### **Hertfordshire connections with Luton in the second quarter of the Sixteenth Century**

Barbara Tearle, ed., *The Accounts of the Guild of the Holy Trinity, Luton, 1526/7-1546/7* (Bedfordshire Historical Record Society, vol. 91, Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2012), £25. ISBN 978-0-85155-078-7

From bequests in wills and references in other documents we know that religious guilds proliferated throughout England until they were dissolved in the late 1540s; very few of their own records, however, have survived. Amongst those rare survivals are the last 21 years of the accounts of the Luton Guild of the Holy Trinity, and also its register. The accounts record the guild's annual income and expenditure, comprising several hundred transactions each year. The very full Introduction includes 11 tables analysing various aspects of the guild's finances and membership between 1526 and 1547, including estimated annual membership, purchases of meat and wheat, and expenditure on property repairs. Unsurprisingly the majority of the guild's 'brothers and sisters' came from within 25 miles of Luton, including locations in Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire, but others came from places further afield, such as London, Canterbury, Boston and Kendal. It is possible to trace these people, and also other connections with Hertfordshire towns and villages, in the very full Index of Places: localities mentioned include Abbots Langley, Baldock, Barnet, Codicote, Flamstead, Knebworth, Pirton, Rickmansworth and St Albans.

The tortuous history of the whereabouts of the guild's accounts and register (pp. lx-lxi) demonstrates how much the survival of such documents is due to luck; that the former has finally come into the possession of Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and the latter of Luton Museum is verging on the miraculous. The Bedfordshire Historical Record Society and Barbara Tearle, the editor, are to be congratulated for making widely available these fascinating accounts, which have been meticulously edited and well indexed. And Luton is to be envied for possessing such rare documentary evidence of an institution that was ubiquitous in medieval England.

**Heather Falvey**

### **Special discount offer price to HRS members:**

Barbara Tearle, ed., *The Accounts of the Guild of the Holy Trinity, Luton*, for only **£18.75** plus postage (£3.00 in the UK). Orders can be placed:

by phone on 01394 610600

by fax on 01394 610316

by email at [trading@boydell.co.uk](mailto:trading@boydell.co.uk)

online at [www.boydellandbrewer.com](http://www.boydellandbrewer.com)

NB When placing an order, by whatever method, please quote the **offer code 13030** to ensure that the discount is given. The offer ends 31st July 2013.

### **Stock of earlier volumes**

Perhaps you joined the HRS recently and would like to make up a complete set of volumes. The two St Albans volumes are out of print and some of the others are getting low in stock, but the following are available at the greatly reduced price of £6 plus £3.50 p&p: I-VI, VIII, X-XIV. (The titles are shown in the notes to the Society's accounts.)

### **Paying by bank transfer**

It is possible to pay your subscription, and/or for book purchases, by bank transfer. If you choose to use this facility, please ensure that you state clearly who has sent the payment and what it is for. Payments by bank transfer should be made to:

Bank: CafCash Ltd,  
Kings' Hill, West Malling,  
Kent, ME19 4JQ

Sort Code: **40-52-40**

A/c name: **Hertfordshire Record Society**

Account Number: **00018349**

If you are paying by bank transfer and need to inform us of, for example, a change of address, please send such information by email to the Secretary at [hfalvey1@btinternet.com](mailto:hfalvey1@btinternet.com)

### **New Treasurer needed from June 2014**

Gwynneth Grimwood is stepping down next year. Although a vital post, it is not too onerous because we are not a large society and Jane Walker manages the book stocks and sales. The Treasurer deals with income and expenditure and Gift Aid administration. The Secretary would be very pleased to hear from anyone willing to take on this role.