

## Chairman's Report

As well as being Chairman, I also represent the HALH Executive Committee on the HRS Board of Trustees. As such I have been able to report on the appointment of Mr Chris Bennett, the new County Archivist and the initiatives he has continued and initiated. Find my past.co.uk has completed the digitisation of the Hertfordshire Parish Registers, which are now available online. The HALH Symposium on Traditional Building Materials was held at Abbots Hill School, at which the book *A Caring County* was launched. This was produced by Hertfordshire Publications, a joint venture of HALH and the University of Hertfordshire Press, of which I am also Chairman. The book consists of chapters by various local historians on themes relating to welfare in the county from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, edited jointly by Steven King and Gillian Gear. I was able to give a short talk at the Symposium on the 'Patent Bricks of Caleb Hitch of Ware' and contribute a chapter to the book on 'Caring for the poor in East Hertfordshire c. 1620-1650'.

Hertfordshire Publications plans to publish four volumes in 2014-5. These include a new book on Garden Cities and New Towns by Stephen V Ward; *Hertfordshire's Parks in the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries* by Anne Rowe; *The Watermills and Windmills of Hertfordshire* by Hugh Howes; and a book on the recent research in the Archaeology of Hertfordshire, edited by Kris Lockyear. It is heartening for all local historians that the Society is able to continue publishing primary sources while others are able to publish secondary sources on the history of the Hertfordshire landscape, artefacts and more modern developments in urban planning.

Other initiatives across the county relate to the various ways in which the First World War is being commemorated. This has involved the establishment, by the Heritage Hub at the University of Hertfordshire, of a coordinating group which has won AHRC/HLF funding and has been chosen to be one of five UK research centres investigating various aspects of the War. The idea is to facilitate research collaboration, between academics headed by Dr Sarah Lloyd and local historians/communities on a number of wartime themes. The overall theme for the UH centre is 'Everyday lives in War' and some of the sub themes will be 'Food and Farming', 'Children of the War' and 'Conscientious Objection'. The main link is through Dr Julie Moore at the University, who is working with the St Albans Arc & Arc on 'St Albans on the Home Front'. Our Society has recently re-launched the volume *Letters of Julian Grenfell* with a new jacket showing photos and sketches from the Western Front. The forthcoming volume *Weston School Records* will also go up to 1914, giving a different glimpse of the period.

The archivist, Gary Moyle has kindly provided the Trustees with lists of recent accessions at HALS, some of which may provide material for future volumes.

We would like also to thank Gwynneth Grimwood, who after 12 years of service has decided to give up her post as Honorary Treasurer of the Society. She is leaving the Society's finances in excellent shape. Her successor will be elected at the forthcoming AGM.

**Alan Thomson**

## Visit to Norton

Last year's AGM took place at the Clulow Room at St George's Church in Letchworth Garden City. This was a memorable occasion as, at the AGM, the Society launched *Baroness Dimsdale's Receipt Book*, which proved not only popular but generated international correspondence about the Hertfordshire origins of doughnuts. Also after the AGM David Croft of the Norton Community Archaeology group gave a presentation on the work of the group researching and writing the forthcoming volume of the Society *Norton Manorial Court Records, 1244-1539*. This was followed by a fascinating guided walk round medieval Norton, including the moated manor house of Nortonbury, the Norman Church of St Nicholas and the old central core of the village, abandoned some think because of the counter attraction of the Knights Templar in Baldock.

**Alan Thomson**



*Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews (foreground, with his back to the camera) explaining excavations to HRS members (and a cow!).*

*Photograph by courtesy of Chris Jordan.*

**The AGM will take place on 21 June 2014 at Weston School, Weston**, the subject of Volume XXX, *Weston School Log Books 1876-1914*, transcribed by Joan Amis, Margaret Bowyer and Janet Gunn; edited and with an introduction by Margaret Ashby. This book will be launched following the AGM.

Weston National (Church of England) School was founded in 1847, when the first pupils were taught in a house near the church. By 1856 a purpose-built school was in operation, with separate provision for infants and older children. From the beginning the head-teacher was required to keep registers and daily log books. The latter

recorded attendance, lessons taught, examinations and any other matters relevant to the children's education.

On the night of 14 January 1883 the school buildings, and almost all their contents, were burnt down. One log book survived but most other records were destroyed. For the next three months classes were held in temporary accommodation, but the school was rebuilt extremely quickly and re-opened on 1 May 1883. Log book entries were resumed and continued in the same hand-written format until the 1950s.

The transcriptions in this volume begin with the earliest surviving log-book, from 29 May 1876 and continue to the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914. The entries reveal vivid glimpses of school and village life over nearly 40 years: the dedication of staff; the pupil-teachers, without whom the school could not function properly; the generosity of school visitors in providing treats and prizes; the hardships imposed by bitter winter weather; the suffering caused by illnesses for which there was then no known cure; and the occasional mystery, such as the events of winter 1882-3.

## Reviews

### **Review of Volume XXVII, *Humphry Repton's Red Books, in Rural History, vol. 24/2 (2013)***

This volume publishes facsimiles of Repton's Red Books for neighbouring properties in the Mimram Valley of East Hertfordshire. Commissioned for the 5<sup>th</sup> Earl Cowper and his cousin Henry Cooper, the Red Books are now owned by Hertfordshire Record Office, which has taken the opportunity to increase access to these valuable but fragile documents. This volume does so attractively, in the oblong octavo format of the Red Books, with clearly photographed illustrations and text. If the paper appears in a darker shade than the originals, this is perhaps to ensure that Repton's penmanship is legible. The introduction might have been more informative given the available archives on the commissions and the extensive published literature on the eighteenth-century gentry, landscape, parks and gardens, particularly in Hertfordshire.

Repton barely mentioned these commissions in his published works, perhaps because the major feature of his plan for Panshanger, a palatial new mansion designed by his son, was never built or, rather, was built to the design of another architect. Panshanger's significance grew with the publication of Dorothy Stroud's 1961 book on Repton which drew on Hugh Prince's pioneering 1959 archival study of the place's parkland design and estate management. After the sale of the house in 1953 and the first deposit of the family archive to the county record office, the park was divided up into lots and quarried for sand and gravel. There is a rich literature on Hertfordshire landscape history including a chapter in Sarah Spooner's 2010 doctoral thesis from the University of East Anglia, 'The Diversity of Designed Landscapes: A Regional Approach c.1660-1830'. This makes it clear that these Red Books of designs and their accompanying manuscript sources are highly significant for an understanding of Repton's art and of the role of designed parks in larger landscape histories.

The Earls Cowper enjoyed spectacularly rising fortunes in the eighteenth century and dealt powerfully in an intricate local land market, sometimes paying well over the going price for modest properties, as well as pushing through enclosures and road diversions, to effectively own and control most of the Mimram Valley from Welwyn to Hertford. Their power in the land came to rival that of their peers in the county, the Earls of Essex at Cassiobury and the Marquis of Salisbury at Hatfield, and they were able to lord it over the bankers, merchants, nabobs and East India Men who sought a stake in the county. The family were not resident for much of this period. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl preferred living in Venice where he amassed a large art collection and the 4<sup>th</sup> died young. The 5<sup>th</sup> Earl, Peter Leopold Louis Francis Nassau Clavering-Cowper, decided to call in Repton soon after succeeding to the title in 1799 in order to stamp the presence of the family in the county. Repton, in his professional way, was on a parallel path to landscape domination. The Cowper commissions are part of the dense cluster of commissions on the Hertfordshire/Essex border within convenient reach of his home at Hare Street. They came at a time when he had already undertaken well over a hundred Red Books and was greatly extending his geographical range. He was keen to raise the theoretical as well as the architectural status of his art in a major published work, in addition to asserting the superiority of a visiting consultant over the locally based land surveyors, builders, nurserymen and owners who undertook so much modest ornamental improvement.

As Repton observed, what distinguished the Cowper's noble domain was its command of lowland river scenery, a highly fashionable subject of landscape prints and paintings of the time. The valley was to be viewed from a picture gallery in the new mansion housing the family's art collection. The young 5<sup>th</sup> Earl appears to be shown in the Red Book drawing the valley, supervised by Repton himself, who always saw his skill as a watercolourist as a way of mixing with the best circles. Cowper's control of the river valley allowed Repton to show off his scientific side, in his hydrological engineering techniques and his interest in the theory of optics. A 'Digression', an extract reproduced from an earlier Red Book for Purley, recalls a walk along the Thames to show the field of vision of an east-west valley at contrasting times of day. In the morning the 'natural' features of water, trees and meadows are highlighted whereas the evening shows 'artificial' features of buildings, boats, paths, villages and towns.

The Red Book for Tewin Water along the valley is focussed on drainage rather than irrigation and the breaching of formally designed standing water to restore 'the rattling trout stream of Hertfordshire, fretting over its bed of gravel'. At the same time as celebrating county topography, Repton was keen to condemn the 'local attachment' of former owners who allowed the public road to cross the water and go close to the windows, 'leaving the house on a kind of peninsula surrounded by carts, wagons, gypsies, poachers &c &c'. Rather less of Repton's plan for Tewin Water seems to have been realised than the introduction of this book suggests. The park, if not the mansion, of Panshanger

was made according to Repton's plan. Pevsner noted in 1953 that it was 'one of Repton's most perfect schemes' and it is still discernible in the remnants left by subsequent development.

**Stephen Daniels, University of Nottingham**

**Review of Volume XXVIII, *the Receipt Book of Baroness Elizabeth Dimsdale, in Petits Propos Culinaires* (PPC), 98, August 2013**

The Dimsdales were a giant dynasty of Hertfordshire doctors dating back to the early eighteenth century. One of them, Thomas (1712–1800) not only practised in Hertford, but also went off to Russia to inoculate Catherine the Great for smallpox and was made councillor of state for his pains, as well as a Russian baron. Later on he was MP for Hertford in the 1780s and wrote extensively on inoculation. He married as his third wife his much younger cousin, who had been part of his household as a sort of housekeeper, Elizabeth (1732–1812). In her sixties, not therefore as a blushing young bride, she wrote down a collection of recipes. Heather Falvey has done a grand job of transcribing and annotating them, not so much for their culinary content as for their context. The Baroness borrowed extensively from her friends and acquaintance and these, as far as possible, are identified and discussed. There is also an excellent glossary. The Baroness travelled to France as well as to Russia in the 1770s and 1780s (her Russian diary has been published). So people will be pleased to see her recipe for Sauerkraut, and for Russian cucumbers which was told her by Yakov Ivanovich Smirnov (1754–1840) Ukrainian chaplain to the Russian church in London from 1782–1837. There is also a goodly selection of recipes obtained from France, from a M. or Mme. Daubigny and Mme. De la Combe. From the provenance of the recipes and the culinary annotations that besprinkle them, this is a manuscript recipe book that well deserved publication and we owe Dr Falvey an honourable debt for her undertaking.

**Tom Jaine**

**Review of Volume XXVIII published in *The Local Historian*, January 2014, volume 44, no.1**

In recent years many record societies have moved away from their traditional focus on medieval documents, transcribed, translated and supported by brief scholarly editorial essays. This new volume from Hertfordshire Record Society fits into the trend for producing books that are of interest to a wide audience, with introductions that are both expert and accessible. At the same time the 'history of food' is a burgeoning industry: the attraction of heritage recipes in National Trust tea-rooms, the output of specialist (such as Prospect Books) and general (Penguin's recent series 'Great Food' for example) publishers, academic conferences and journals, and an extensive list of websites.

Elizabeth Dimsdale (1732–1812) was a member of a well-known Hertfordshire landowning family with interests primarily in medicine, as well as banking. She married Baron Thomas Dimsdale (1712–1800) in 1779, shortly after the death of his second wife with whom he had had ten children. They were not only related but Elizabeth had lived with his family as a kind of housekeeper for some years. Thomas's pioneering work

in inoculation against smallpox attracted attention and he travelled widely as a result. Not long after their marriage he was summoned to Russia to inoculate the grandsons of Catherine the Great, and Elizabeth accompanied him and kept a record of the journey. An observant traveller, she commented on differences between the life she knew at home and what she was seeing around her, and was particularly interested in food and medicinal remedies.

After the death of her husband, she seems to have decided to bring together her collection of recipes and other useful household information, and made a fair copy of 770 items, in random order, in a parchment-bound book which is the basis of this volume. Dr Falvey begins her introduction by describing Elizabeth's place in the Dimsdale family. She then discusses the provenance of the receipts (over 200 give the name from whom Elizabeth obtained them, and others' sources can be located) and how Elizabeth's book compares with other manuscript and printed collections of the time. Just as the role of household management did not require experience as a hands-on cook, this is not a working cookery book. However it is clear that the instructions and their results had been tested, as some are annotated 'excellent' or 'this did not answer'.

For this publication the receipts have been arranged into chapters following the model of Elizabeth Raffald's *The Experienced English Housekeeper* (first edition 1769, reprinted 1997). To select but a few examples of the interest revealed in each section is invidious but inevitable: freshwater fish (carp in fishponds?); making use of the entire animal (calves head becoming mock turtle); the influence of eastern trade (plenty of curries); veal used more than today; cooked lettuce; the need to make staples we would buy (raspberry vinegar); quantities of ingredients ('a light pudding' that begins with a pint of cream and six eggs, or pastry with one pound of butter to one pound of flour); local traditions (Dunstable Larks). There are instructions for 'preserving' in numerous different ways, essential without refrigeration, though interestingly one of Elizabeth's comments during her Russian visit described how she heard that 'Veal frozen at Archangel and brought to St Petersburg is esteemed the finest they have, nor can it be distinguished at the Table from that which is fresh killed'. To twenty-first century tastes some of these receipts sound delicious (A Duck Pye, or Princess Amelia's pudding), while others are perhaps less attractive (Mock Asses Milk).

Appendices cover the original order of the entries in Elizabeth's book, brief biographies of the donors of receipts, where identified, and Elizabeth's will. These are followed by an invaluable glossary of ingredients and utensils, a full bibliography and the usual excellent record society publication index (in this case divided into persons, places, receipts and subjects). From both the introduction and the receipts themselves, the modern reader gains a fascinating insight into eighteenth century life that goes well beyond mealtimes.

**Jane Howells**

### **Baroness Dimsdale's doughnuts go global (briefly)**

In the August 2013 issue of *The Local Historian*, John Chandler tried to initiate a debate about the future of record societies; however, from his rather half-hearted attempt to suggest that they have had their day, it became clear that he believes that record societies do have a role to play and do provide a service for historians – family, local, academic – not least because they make accessible records that would otherwise remain stored away and disregarded.

Chandler's article highlighted one of the problems faced by record societies: many individual members renew their membership out of loyalty to the society, rather than because they have a burning desire to own such a wide-ranging collection of volumes relating to the county in question. Volumes are duly distributed to members but how to persuade other people to purchase the remaining volumes in the print run presents a challenge. One solution is to have volumes reviewed in suitable journals and thus to publicise them more widely to the academic community. *Baroness Elizabeth Dimsdale's Receipt Book* proved difficult to place for review purposes: not rural enough for *Rural History*, not social enough for *Social History* and not agricultural enough for the *Agricultural History Review*. So where to send it? We decided to contact a local newspaper: Elizabeth Dimsdale and her husband, Thomas, the famous smallpox inoculator, had a home in Hertford and she had attributed a number of the recipes to friends and acquaintances living in north east Hertfordshire. The *Hertfordshire Mercury*, which covers Hertford and Ware, was sufficiently interested by the volume to interview me over the phone and to publish a two-page feature article on 24 October.

Not long before the *Receipt Book* went to press, an American food writer based in New York had contacted the Hertfordshire Association for Local History for assistance with his research into the history of doughnuts. Michael Kronld had deduced that doughnuts originated in Hertfordshire, the earliest reference he could find being in William Hone, *The Year Book of Daily Recreation and Information* (1832). He enquired whether any HALH member could shed further light. It rang a bell with me and, sure enough, there on page 111 of Elizabeth's book (p.100 in the HRS edition) was a recipe for 'Dow Nuts'. They are clearly recognizable as forerunners of the modern doughnut: they are 'nuts' of flour, butter, eggs, sugar and yeast cooked in hogs'-lard almost boiling hot, although they are not coated in sugar.

Michael was delighted to hear of this recipe which moved back the production of doughnuts by several years, although by exactly how many it is impossible to determine for Elizabeth had received the recipe from 'Mrs Fordham'. Elizabeth had compiled her book between 1800 (the date of the paper's watermark) and 1808 (the date of the last entry, a household hint taken from a publication of that year); however 'Mrs Fordham' cannot be positively identified. There are at least 5 possible candidates: Edward Fordham of Therfield (1721-1778) and his wife, Mary, had 4 sons, each of whom married, so any of these 4 sisters-in-law or their mother-in-law may have supplied the recipe.

To add spice to the feature in the *Hertfordshire Mercury*, I told them about the doughnut recipe (and the *OED* had also been informed). It seems there was not much news on Thursday 24 October: the Press Agency picked up the story about the earliest recipe for doughnuts. That afternoon *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Times* contacted HALS for a picture of the original (although this was never published because the owner needed to be contacted and the various editors wanted it instantly); several papers rang my home for more information but as I was out (shock, horror) their online editions simply regurgitated what was in the *Mercury*. I was also contacted by a Hertfordshire local radio station and one in Ireland and subsequently gave telephone interviews which were broadcast. The record society's email address received several messages, including one from an Australian who was researching the history of doughnuts. There were even some comments on Twitter. Needless to say, the 'global' reporting was not completely accurate: the *Mercury* reporter had reproduced our conversation more or less verbatim but when the online versions of the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror* took the story up, aspects were embroidered or dropped. For example, Elizabeth became a member of the British aristocracy (her husband's title of 'Baron' was Russian, awarded by Catherine the Great) and the articles only mentioned the doughnut recipe.

So, what did all of this do for the HRS? Few sales were generated as a result of this brief global exposure: the recipe was published in full in several places so doughnut researchers did not need to buy the book. However, the *Mercury* feature did produce extra sales locally, which was the original purpose of the exercise. And the exposure suggests that record society volumes are still relevant: no commercial publisher would have taken on Elizabeth's book, and if the HRS had not done so, the earliest recorded doughnut recipe (so far) would never have come to light.

**Heather Falvey**

Versions of this article have been published in the *Rickmansworth Historical Review* and *Local History News*.

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