

Chairman: Dr Alan Thomson

Secretary: Dr Heather Falvey

Treasurer: Mr Paul Cassidy

Chairman's Report

The Society has kept going during these peculiar times. The trustees have carried on their meetings via Zoom and have had some lively and serious discussions about the aims of the Society, the type of volumes we wish to produce, necessary changes to the constitution and how we can improve our operations. We are planning to digitize our earlier volumes that are now out of print, and are considering estimates from three companies for their digitisation, as well as for a new, more flexible website.

I would like to thank our Secretary, Heather Falvey, for organising the Zoom meetings, which is not an easy task given our varying expertise in accessing and manipulating computer programmes. I would also like to thank our Treasurer, Paul Cassidy, for setting us straight on issues relating to Gift Aid, managing our finances so effectively, and setting out professional accounts for the year. We are pleased to have the services of Chris Brimblecombe, the former Treasurer of the Hertfordshire Association for Local History, as our independent examiner, who oversees our annual accounts.

Our General Editor, Sue Flood, has been dealing with a variety of future volumes coming on stream and also finalising *John Carrington, Farmer Bramfield, his diary, 1798-1810, Volume 2, 1805-1810, & John Carrington junior's diary, May 1810 to 1812*. Like the other volume editors she has been held up by the lack of access to the originals for checking, as a result of HALS closure during lockdown. We thank her for her hard work on all of these volumes

Philip Sheail has stepped down as a Trustee but he has kindly agreed to produce this year's Newsletter. We thank him for his services to, and membership of, the trustees as well as his editorship of two excellent volumes on the Third Earl Cowper. Alison Cassidy has produced some useful statistics on the progress of our book and map sales as well as organising the distribution of new volumes. Eileen Wallace, who is working hard on the forthcoming volume on *Hertford Gaol Records*, is also a valued Trustee, as is Bridget Howlett, who is working on a volume tentatively entitled *Farming and Gardening in Hitchin in the Early Nineteenth Century: William Wilshere's Farm Memoranda*.

Gary Moyle, our representative from HALS and the Library Services, has kept us up to date with the latest acquisitions by HALS and developments during lockdown including many additions to their online catalogue. You will be pleased to hear that HALS is now open again after closure and has a new conservator.

As in previous years the Society retains its close links with the HALH and I report back to each organisation on developments in the other. HALH decided to use the facilities of Zoom to have a series of online talks last winter, which they plan to continue in the future. The HRS is also experimenting with the idea by following this year's online AGM with two talks on processes of research, one by David Short, on his forthcoming volume, *Ashwell Overseers' Accounts*, and the other one by Heather Falvey on transcribing the pre-Reformation wills from the old parish of Rickmansworth and what they reveal about the medieval church of St Mary.

You will all be intrigued to hear that the Society will have some national publicity through the continuation of the 'doughnuts saga' when Heather Falvey will appear on the Channel 4 programme *Food Unwrapped* to talk about the local origins of 'dow-nuts' in Hertfordshire. Hopefully it will give us more food for thought.

Alan Thomson

Volume XXXVII, *Ashwell Overseers' Accounts, 1676 to 1722*

When it was first suggested that I might find the accounts of the overseers of the poor interesting, I wondered what I was being led into and how accounts could possibly deepen my understanding of my parish. I was soon to learn that I was wrong and that accounts, especially those of the overseers of the poor, can provide insights into parish life not to be found elsewhere.

The office of the overseer of the poor was established by the Poor Law Act of 1597/8, was made compulsory by the Poor Relief Act of 1601 and carried on until 1925, although with less power, after the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. From the accounts we begin to get an idea of who they considered to be the poor, although we know from other sources that the question as to who were the 'deserving poor' vexed them as much then as it does us today. The poor were divided into two groups; those who were temporarily poor and needed relief to get over an immediate problem such as a man being off work temporarily after an accident and those who were too old or permanently unable to work. To cover these groups there were three types of payments: casual disbursement, pensions and, if there was a workhouse (which after 1727 a parish could have), payments for the workhouse.

This HRS volume covers the years from 1676 to 1722 for Ashwell and is a good example of what care was needed in a parish. Pensions, a fixed amount, were paid regularly. A widow living on her own might get 2 shillings (5p) per week and two widows, who were sharing accommodation, get 1 shilling (2½p) each. Addresses are not given so we do not know where they lived which could have been in their own or children's homes or parish almshouses. The almshouses were owned by the parish and therefore money was spent on their maintenance which is listed: e.g., in 1707-8 £1 4s 0d was spent 'For making a new loft in an Almshouse: work and materials'. Rent payments were common and in 1713-4 a total of £8 19s 8d was paid out. It would seem that it was cheaper to keep people in their own homes rather than providing accommodation. The poor needed to be clothed. Shifts, stockings, gowns, shirts, a frock, a 'pity coate' and a 'bodys' together with shoes, new and being mended, were all paid for.

Some births and many deaths and some family activities in between, are recorded. A midwife paid for, children fostered, apprenticeships paid for, doctors and bonesetters sent for and sickness dealt with by local people. Death features prominently; people are looked after in their final days, the body laid out and prepared for burial and then the burial costs met. There are also some

interesting references such as paying guides to take strangers to the next parish, a reminder of the lack of maps and road signs at that time, as well as an indication that strangers were not necessarily welcome.

The Ashwell overseers' accounts will, I hope, give encouragement to look at those from your local parish.

David Short

Review of Volume 36, *The Third Earl Cowper and His Florentine Household. 1760-90, from Hertfordshire People, 156, March 2021*

Like many young men of the British aristocracy and gentry of the 17th to late 18th centuries, George Nassau Clavering-Cowper, Viscount Fordwich (later the 3rd Earl Cowper), the eldest son of William Cowper (later Clavering-Cowper), the 2nd Earl Cowper and his first wife, Henrietta Nassau d'Auverquerque embarked on the Grand Tour of Europe in the January 1757. Such tours were envisaged as an educational rite of passage to enable the young gentleman concerned to acquire exposure to, and thereby knowledge or learning of, the legacy of classical antiquity as well as the many facets of the Renaissance in art, literature, and music throughout Continental Europe, but with heavy emphasis upon the culture of the Italian peninsula. An adjunct to a young man's submersion in the culture of foreign lands was contact with the mores of the aristocratic and polite society of the continent that undoubtedly differed to the genteel ways of the Home Counties. By 1759, George had arrived in Florence and apart from a short trip to England was well established in the city state of the once powerful Medici family that was once known as the Athens of the Middle Ages. From 1780, George resided at the Villa Palmieri in Fiesole with his wife, Hannah Anne Gore and their three children.

Philip Sheail's study of Lord Cowper's household at Florence primarily concentrates the accounts of the household's expenditure. Part 1 covers the period of 1760 to 1780, whilst Part 2 is a continuation of the 1780 accounts to 1789. The author has indeed produced a *tour de force* in which the *minutiae* of the running of Lord Cowper's household has been enumerated with exactitude and is a fascinating insight into the workings of a noble family's day to day life where wealth gave expression to unlimited vistas to the family concerned but also to the myriad of servants, painters, artisans and other suppliers of foodstuffs and goods to support the running of his household as well as the good citizens of Florence who may well have received largesse from the wealthy English m'lord.

This volume is a most worthy companion to the Hertfordshire Record Society - Volume 31 (2015) *Lord Fordwich's Grand Tour, 1756-60*.

John J. Tunesi of Liongam

Review of Volume 36, *The Third Earl Cowper and His Florentine Household. 1760-90, from The Art Newspaper, No. 332, March 2021*

Almost half the holdings of the Hertfordshire Archive and Library Service come from the remarkably complete set of papers from Panshanger Park, the seat of the Earls Cowper situated on the western edge of Hertford, England, before its demolition in 1953. The family archives include a comprehensive group recording the third earl's 30-year stay in Florence. The papers include the travel journal of Cowper's Grand Tour from 1756 to

1760. The journal was written in French by his Swiss tutor, Jean Chastellain, and was translated and published as the 31st volume of the Hertfordshire Record Publications in 2015. The most recent contribution to the series is a pair of volumes that examine Cowper's domestic expenses and his household arrangements during his extended stay in Florence.

Rather than reproducing accounts for each year, the transcription takes a snapshot of every fifth year: from 1760 to 1785 and then 1789 (the year of Cowper's death). It charts the increase in expenditure that occurred when he inherited the earldom following the death of his father in 1764. A similar boost in his outgoings followed his marriage to Anna Gore in 1775, and the birth of their three sons further increased the expenditure.

Cowper's concern about an unexplained rise in costs in 1780 resulted in a reappraisal of his staff and their various benefits. The several revisions of this report provide a valuable insight into the management of the household and, if comparable papers exist for similar households in Britain and Italy, instructive comparisons could be made. The final transcript is of the household inventory that was taken immediately after Cowper's death, together with a copy of his will. The transcripts are prefaced by a lengthy biography of Cowper (much of it in the 2015 publication) and there are biographies of the *dramatis personae* including Cowper's servants. The bibliography is slim, with surprising omissions, but the indexes are helpful.

In many regards, however, these transcripts are disappointing, listing banal expenditure rather than anything extraordinary. As the author notes, in the 1760s Cowper hosted concerts, in the 1770s he amassed an astonishing collection of Old Master paintings with the help of the painter Johan Zoffany, and in the 1780s his interest turned to scientific matters. Yet these activities hardly appear in the accounts. There are no prices recorded for Cowper's paintings by Raphael, Andrea del Sarto or Fra Bartolommeo.

Two new snippets of art-historical information interested this reviewer: new biographical details about the Soaneian architect Christopher Ebdon, and the large sum of 334 lire paid to the sculptor Francis Harwood for transporting sculptures to Livorno. They were to form part of the memorial to Cowper's father in Hertingfordbury church.

Hugh Belsey

'Hertfordshire Record Society and Florentine local history' by Philip Sheail, *Local History News* No. 139, Spring 2021, pp.20-21.

The historical documents consulted by local historians (and published by record societies) are usually records compiled by landowners or their agents, public bodies, local officers or even tradesmen, who actually resided in that particular area. Quite often, however, the affairs of a town or village were affected by developments taking place in a completely different location. Thus historians often have to look beyond local records to gain a full appreciation of the influences that may have been in play at a particular time.

One such local record would be the diary kept by John Carrington, a farmer in the village of Bramfield in Hertfordshire. A transcript of his diary and related documents for the years 1798-1810 has been published by

the Hertfordshire Record Society (HRS).¹ At one point Carrington refers to a member of the local nobility (and his landlord), George Nassau Clavering Cowper, of Cole Green House, who

was born at London Aug[u]st 1738, the 3rd Earl Cowper, brought up at Cole Green till 16 years of age and then went abroad to Ittiley [Italy] at this age and did not return, though very much desired so to do by his father in his life time. Till July 1786 he came to England over to Cole Green House and stayd about 3 months & returned againe to Florance, but he was brought back to Cole Green house to be buried on Tuesday the 16th of February [1790].

From this diary entry, therefore, we learn that the head of a prominent noble family in Carrington's neighbourhood chose to absent himself for 30 years and live in Florence. Thus not only was the locality robbed of the beneficial presence and patronage expected of a local landowner, but also the income generated by tenants such as John Carrington was syphoned off to fund the earl's luxurious lifestyle in Italy.

This kind of situation occurred in many localities and often resulted in a paucity of records for the period in question. However, in the case of Viscount Fordwich, later the 3rd Earl Cowper, his family papers were brought back to England after his death in December 1789, and in due course they were deposited in, and subsequently purchased by, the Hertfordshire Record Office (now Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies). Many of the earl's papers were written in French and Italian, and some of them have now been translated and published by the HRS. They comprise firstly, as Volume 31, a transcript, translated from the French, of a journal of Lord Fordwich's Grand Tour 1756-60, kept by his Swiss tutor.² It was this tour that introduced Lord Fordwich to the pleasures of Italy and at the end of 1759, instead of returning home as planned, he headed back to Florence. This should have been no more than a brief extension of his tour, but in the event his lordship kept putting off his return and, on succeeding to the earldom in 1764, he made Florence his permanent home.

The HRS's latest publication, Volume 36,³ is a companion to Volume 31, and details the record of Earl Cowper's household expenditure for the whole 30 years of his residence in Florence. When he first arrived back in the city from his Grand Tour in January 1760 he was a bachelor of 21 years, attended by four servants. By the time of his death in December 1789 he and his countess were presiding over a household of 36 servants, whose status ranged from that of major-domo, through cook, confectioner, perruquier, lady's maid, valets, footmen and under-footmen, doorkeepers, housemaids, coachmen to stable hands. In 1760, in today's terms, his total household expenditure amounted to about £180,000; the figure for 1789 was over £1 million. And that was just his household expenditure: over the years additional sums were spent on his interests in art, music and science.

[There followed a summary of the volume's contents.]

The earl did not completely forget about his Hertfordshire estate. In his absence Cole Green House was let to members of his family and the estate was kept in good order. It is apparent from correspondence with his sister that he contributed generously to musical concerts that she hosted in the neighbourhood and to local charities, as well as to the new Shire Hall, built in Hertford in the

early 1770s. From the accounts we find that he installed paintings of Cole Green House in his Florentine palazzo and that he engaged an English sculptor in Florence to fashion an elaborate memorial to his father which still stands in the Cowper family chapel in Hertingfordbury church. Nonetheless, the earl never showed any inclination actually to visit Cole Green House, nor see his father's memorial in its final setting. The visit mentioned by John Carrington in 1786 was purely incidental to the main purpose of his trip to England, which was to lobby for the post of British Resident in Florence, at that time occupied by the elderly and ailing Sir Horace Mann. Thus it is only through studying the archive relating to the Florentine end of the story that we can gain a fully rounded perspective on this period in the history of one Hertfordshire locality.

<http://www.hrsociety.org.uk/>

1. S. Flood, ed, *The Diary of John Carrington, Farmer of Bramfield, 1798-1810*, Volume I (1798- 1804) (HRS vol. 26, 2015) p. 270.
2. S. White and P. Sheail, eds, *Lord Fordwich's Grand Tour, 1756-1760* (HRS vol. 31, 2015).
3. P. Sheail, ed, *The Third Earl Cowper and his Florentine Household, 1760-1790* (HRS vol. 36, 2020)

Tales from the parsonage

A copy of Volume XVIII, *Two Nineteenth Century Hertfordshire Diaries*, was purchased recently by Rowena Beighton-Dykes because she is researching the decorating interests of the Rev. Thomas Newcome, rector of Shenley. She knew that a wallpaper supplier's ledger, held at the Victoria & Albert Museum, recorded that, on 21 May 1847, the Rev. Thomas Newcome of the Rectory, Shenley, purchased three different patterned wallpapers. They were 15 pieces of a red leaf paper on a satin ground, 14 pieces of a red and green floral paper on a cream ground, and 20 pieces of a deep red floral paper on a cream ground. In his diary he noted that on 19 May 1847 he went to London and Kew Green and on 21 May he 'dined & bed at Hadows, Harley Street': this fits with his purchasing wallpaper in London that day. (*Two Diaries*, p.255)

Rowena subsequently gave a talk (via Zoom) to members of the Wallpaper History Society, entitled 'Tales from the Parsonage'. Coincidentally this was 'attended' by Christopher Jordan, who is also a member of the HRS. He reported that in her talk she explained that she was researching vicarage wallpapers in various counties including Hertfordshire and that several other Herts vicars, as well as Newcome, were mentioned in the V&A ledger. She outlined expectations and social pressures placed upon clergymen as they expected to be seen to have a certain social status, which was sometimes beyond their financial means to achieve and might even lead to the sale of entire stock from glebe land and other resources associated with their role. Quality wallpaper was one of the signs of nineteenth-century social status.

Rowena is Hon. Treasurer, Wallpaper History Society and Hon. Editor of the *Wallpaper History Review* (www.wallpaperhistorysociety.org.uk)

Heather Falvey

Margaret Ashby (1940-2021)

We were sorry to learn that Margaret Ashby passed away on 8 March. As well as being a long-standing member of the Record Society and a committee member/trustee from 1998 to 2017, she also edited Volume XXI, *The Hellard Almshouses and other Stevenage Charities, 1482–2005* and Volume XXX, *Weston School Log Books, 1876–1914*, transcribed by Joan Amis, Margaret Bowyer and Janet Gunn.

Margaret was born in Stevenage and lived in the same house there all her life. She was a keen local historian, writing, or co-writing, a number of books on various aspects of Stevenage's history, beginning with *The book of Stevenage* (1982), and including *Historic buildings of Stevenage* (2008), with Alan Cudmore and Colin Killick, based on research guided by Adrian Gibson, and *Stevenage: a history from Roman times to the present day* (2010), with Don Hills, published by Stevenage Borough Council.

Margaret was a fierce protector of the countryside around Stevenage. In 1989, with Dr John Hepworth, she co-founded the Friends of Forster Country, their aim being 'to preserve for all time the open green space to the north of Stevenage known as The Forster Country'. The writer E. M. Forster (1879-1970) had lived at Rooks Nest House from 1883 to 1893 and in later life returned there often, as the guest of composer Elizabeth Poston. Margaret wrote both *Forster Country* (1991) and *Elizabeth Poston, Composer: Her Life at Rooks Nest* (2005). She worked tirelessly to defend Forster Country and latterly campaigned hard against the development which will see 800 homes and a primary school built on the land between North Road and Weston Road.

Rather than go straight to university Margaret began work for the Hertfordshire County Library Service, qualified as a chartered librarian and then moved into a career in further education. She gained a first degree in English and history, and an MA in English literature. After taking early retirement, she was a tutor in local and oral history for the University of Cambridge Institute of Continuing Education. One of her courses, entitled 'Church and Town', ran for two terms in 1997-8 and met in St Nicholas' church. She inspired her students, including HRS trustee and HALS archivist Gary Moyle, to undertake original research and subsequently, in 1999, they published, under Margaret's editorship, *St Nicholas' Church, Stevenage: Recent Research I*. Another educational role was her work with the Betty Game Opportunities Trust, set up in 2009 in memory of her dear friend Betty, which gives financial help to Stevenage people studying with the Open University.

Wherever Margaret went, her dogs went too, waiting in her car while she was at meetings. She also enjoyed retreats to her cottage in Suffolk. She was unfailingly polite yet a very forceful lady. She will be greatly missed.

Heather Falvey

Gift Aid

The treasurer Paul Cassidy has brought the matter of gift aid to the attention of the Trustees. Gift aid is available to enable charities to recover basic rate tax made by donors on gifts to the charity; the key word here is 'gifts'.

HMRC takes the view that membership fees are donations, which is why many charities utilise the gift aid scheme to boost their membership fee income. There is, however, a caveat; namely, that any benefit the member receives from membership must be sufficiently incidental not to compromise the status of the membership fee as a gift. The rule applied by HMRC is that the value of any benefit must not exceed 25% of the membership fee; if that limit is exceeded then the fee cannot be considered to be a gift. The value of a benefit is the price which a member would otherwise have to pay to enjoy it. In the case of HRS, the benefit enjoyed is the receipt of the volume published for the year, which, at the price which would otherwise be paid (i.e., the non-member price) exceeds 100% of the membership fee.

Thus we have to conclude that that HRS is not eligible to receive gift aid from HMRC on membership fees, although previous claims were made in good faith. In the 2019 accounts gift aid had been accrued for both 2018 and 2019 and totalled £394 at the end of 2019. As this amount cannot be claimed it has been written off in the accounts to 31 December 2020.

Members currently pledging gift aid no longer need to reflect their subscription to HRS in their own tax returns.

Heather Falvey

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 when making your payment, it is clear 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 need to inform us of a change of address, please inform the Secretary. Her contact details are:

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Data protection statement

Since you are a member of this Society, the Secretary and Treasurer hold your personal details: name and address, and telephone number (if supplied) and e-mail address (if supplied). This information is used in the ordinary running of the Society. Under no circumstances will this information be disclosed to a third party without your express permission, unless required by law.

The HRS has a data protection policy which is available to members upon request to the Secretary.