

Chairman: Dr Alan Thomson

Secretary: Dr Heather Falvey

Treasurer: Mr Paul Cassidy

Chairman's Report

This year the Trustees have met via Zoom, which has worked well and has enabled those who live a long distance from County Hall to be involved without travel. They have overseen the publication of three volumes. The first is *Churchwardens' Accounts of Berkhamsted St. Peter, 1584-1660*, and is Hertfordshire Record Society's volume for the year 2022/23.

David Short's *Ashwell Overseers' Accounts 1676-1722* broke new ground in that not only had he transcribed the actual accounts, but also managed to put together an Appendix of all the overseers throughout the period and some biographies of the overseers themselves, some parish officers and notables and even some of the poor families that frequently appeared in the records.

I am pleased to say that the second volume of *John Carrington's Diary* (HRS Volume XXXIII) will be launched at the AGM. It reveals further insights into the life and times of this most interesting of characters. (See the note at the end of this Newsletter.)

Other local historians have also been building up biographical accounts of local people. Gill Cordingley of the Hertford and Ware Local History Society has spent some time researching the life of Dr. Thomas Dimsdale of Hertford. In the last two issues of the local journal *Herts Past & Present* she has identified his pioneering work in inoculating local people against smallpox in Hertford, and in the Spring issue relates how he travelled to the court of Catherine the Great of Russia to inoculate her and her courtiers. For his pains he was made Baron of the Russian Empire and, on returning to Hertford, carried out a mass inoculation of the county militia in 1778. On the theme of biographies and Russia, Philippa Parker wrote in the 2021 issues on two Russian women, Fanny Stepniak, fleeing to Britain because of her revolutionary activities, and Natalie Ertel coming to Ayot St. Lawrence and becoming involved in a local scandal.

A recently published biography of a local character was that by Deborah Spring on the *Mistress of Gorhambury, Lady Anne Bacon, Tudor courtier and scholar*, who managed to survive four Tudor monarchs. It is another welcome study of women whose influence in the past has been neglected by many historians.

It is also good to see that local history societies that might have been thought defunct can be reborn, such as the Colney Heath and District Society; they have produced a new volume on *Colney Heath Chronicles, A History* by Ruth Herman, to be followed by a second volume focussing on the Victorian period.

It is encouraging to see that local historians are venturing into the twentieth century, such as in *Industrial Letchworth: The first Garden City 1903-1920*, produced by the Letchworth Local History Research Group and published by the University of Hertfordshire Press.

In addition, Shelley Savage has been researching The Land Settlement movement of the 1920s, and found that Lord Rothschild of Tring sold 180 acres to the county council for the scheme. Maybe modern politicians could learn from this initiative to help solve the current shortage of social housing.

Alan Thomson

AGM 2022 Venue

The venue for this year's AGM, on Saturday 18th June, is The Court House, at (Great) Berkhamsted. This building, where the port-mote or borough court was held, is next to St. Peter's church, to the north-west. The *Victoria County History (VCH Herts, vol. 2, p.164)* gives the following description of the building's history.

'It is a half-timbered house with a fine open roof probably of sixteenth-century date. The ownership of this house seems to have been a matter of frequent dispute. It is said to have been built on the waste of the manor, and therefore claimed by the lord, while on the other hand it was alleged that it was built by the inhabitants for their own use. In the middle of the sixteenth century the court-house is stated to have belonged to the churchwardens, but in 1591 the crown granted it to Edward Stanley. In Sir John Dodderidge's survey of the manor, made in 1607, this house is again stated to have been in the hands of the churchwardens for the use of the inhabitants, and was from time to time leased by them, provision being made in the leases for the use by the churchwardens of part of the house called the church loft. It seems to have remained in the possession of the churchwardens till about 1673, when an information was filed by the Attorney-General against the churchwardens as to their right, and judgement was given for the crown. It seems afterwards to have passed with the manor, and in that way came into the possession of Earl Brownlow, who in turn granted it to trustees at a nominal rent to be used as a national school.'

Nowadays the Court House is in the ownership of St. Peter's parish.

Heather Falvey

Churchwardens' Accounts of Berkhamsted St. Peter, 1584-1660, edited and introduction by Nick Brown (HRS Volume XXXVIII)

This volume is the text of the churchwardens' accounts for Berkhamsted St. Peter 1584-1660, extracted from the book of the accounts held at the British Library, which continues until 1748. The book was apparently sent away from the parish in connection with a court case and was sold at auction by an unknown seller in 1851.

The early years of the accounts are either fragmentary or missing, but from 1589 there are detailed accounts for most years through to the 1630s. Unfortunately, the accounts between 1632 and 1637 are missing and when the record resumes the content has changed, so that there are no detailed accounts, but there are details of church rates and records of the management of charitable donations through lists of those receiving benefits. It is only from 1656 that detailed churchwardens' accounts resume.

The accounts show the receipts from sources such as parish property and payments for burial. They include details of payments for church administration and building works, particularly on the roofs of the church and including the refashioning of the church bells. Payments recorded for works such as the improvement of the pulpit indicate the parish adapting to the changing requirements of worship.

Beyond the accounts themselves there is significant further material included in these records. For example, there are details of those who provided purveyance for the royal residence at Hatfield, inventories of the church goods, notably with one inventory from the late Commonwealth period; and details of arms and armour held by the parish are listed, including one inventory of the minimal holding in 1588 at the time of the Armada.

Extensive repairs to the church, which was in great decay, necessitated the raising of funds through rates and there are numerous lists of those rates and indications of disputes with parishioners as to the rates claimed.

The receipts and expenditure of the overseers of the poor are summarised for many years. The late 1620s were a time of hardship and orders of the vestry were made attempting to regulate the assistance given to the poor and the conduct of parishioners during church services.

The introduction sets the records in context and discusses the varying types of expenditure revealed by the accounts. There is detailed analysis of the rate lists and the treatment of the poor. Beyond this analysis the text offers information which can be examined to throw a light on many aspects of parish life in the first half of the seventeenth century.

Nick Brown

Weather Diaries of John Gadbury and Sir John Wittewronge

As part of a project analysing John Gadbury's weather diary for London, 1668-1700, I needed a comparable diary to contrast with Gadbury's wind directions, and to check claims of bias by Brooks and Hunt (1933). Sir John Wittewronge's diary was therefore ideal for the purpose (Tinkler, forthcoming in *Weather*).

To facilitate this analysis I transcribed the weather diary to spreadsheets to compare with those I made for Gadbury. Copies are being deposited with the Hertfordshire Record Office, to be made available for use and copying, together with materials explaining the method of best using these. A brief guide to contents and use is provided here, as it may also be useful for anyone designing their own weather diary.

The dates used in my study were, naturally, old style, and to obtain a modern date it is necessary to add ten days, which may occasion a change of month. I primarily used Sir John Wittewronge's spellings and settled on one wind direction per day, even if more are mentioned. Detailed annotations by Sir John within his diary are omitted, unless they have a direct bearing on the weather, although a few longer notes are placed in text boxes. I have noted some comparisons with Gadbury's diary for days with exceptional weather. John Gadbury's diary is available online, but a hard copy, published by ECCO, was reprinted in 1710 of the first 1691 edition.

My comparison with Sir John's diary reveals that there was some bias in Gadbury's diary, favouring West winds, rather than South West winds. However, this reflects the fact that most weather diarists of the period loosely referred winds to cardinal directions: Northerly, therefore, was used as much as North or North West, and so similarly for East, South and West. Beyond maritime activity there was little point in more precise directions, they were little mentioned by astronomers, and windmillers no doubt adjusted to the wind at hand. Nevertheless, when I computed vector directions for bi-monthly wind frequencies (1684-1689) for both Gadbury and Sir John there was, overall, a satisfactory statistical correspondence.

References:

- Stevenson, J. and Harcourt Williams M., eds., *'Observations of Weather', The Weather Diary of Sir John Wittewronge of Rothamsted, 1684-1689*, vol. XV (1999)
Tinkler, K. J., 'John Gadbury's Errant Wind', *Weather*. (2022) (forthcoming)

K.J. Tinkler

More weather observations

'Observations of Weather', The diary of Sir John Wittewronge of Rothamsted, 1684-1689, vol. XV, is published by and available from the Hertfordshire Record Society. The introduction covers his family history, political career and other aspects of seventeenth century Hertfordshire life. The diary also gives a picture

of the climate in a small part of the county at a time when Europe was experiencing the Little Ice Age, including the weather of 1683-84, the coldest on record.

Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies hold not only a copy of Sir John Wittewronge's diary, together with much of his correspondence, but fascinating artwork inspired by this study. Images of water colour pictures, and other media used to reflect these records of weather patterns, are available to view online.

In keeping with the weather theme, Hertfordshire Archives has also contributed the following photograph, probably from the early twentieth century, of floods in Watford and the milk deliveries managed no matter what the difficulties! Copies of newspaper stories detailing



flooding in Hertfordshire during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are also available to study at Hertfordshire Archives, the most frequent cause of these floods being extremely severe weather conditions, including violent storms and sudden thaws following a heavy snowfall.

Anne-Marie Ford

Review of *Records of Norton in the Liberty of St. Albans 1244-1539* (HRS vol. XXIX) (previously published in *St. Albans & Hertfordshire Architectural and Archaeological Society Newsletter* no. 223)

The settlement of Norton, lying midway between medieval Baldock and Ebenezer Howard's Garden City of Letchworth (1903), is fortunate not only in the exceptional quantity and quality of its surviving manorial documents, but also in the devoted care and expertise of its Community Archaeology Group which, in 2014, numbered at least one hundred members. Norton's history is here brought to light by a twenty-strong team who produced this magnificent and highly readable volume in the series of Hertfordshire Record Publications. Nor should we forget the outstanding transcription and most excellent translation of the documents by Peter Foden, as well as the professional assistance of the Garden City Heritage Fund, of North Hertfordshire's Archaeology Officer and of Sue Flood, then County Archivist. This was truly a team effort in uncovering local history and in making it available to a wider audience.

The earliest document to mention Norton, an isolated settlement near Letchworth, is a possibly spurious charter of Aethelred in 1007 which refers to an eighth-century donation by Offa of Mercia (d.796) to the Benedictine Abbey of St. Albans. More reliably the Manor of Norton is confirmed amongst the lands held by the Abbey in the Domesday survey of 1086. Subsequently, the church and parish of Norton was one of the fifteen to be named in the bull *Religiosam vitam eligentibus* of 1157 issued by Adrian IV, the only English pope and himself from Bedmond, as part of the so-called Liberty of St. Albans, which was also co-terminus with the Hundred of Cashio. Henceforth, Norton, together with the churches of St. Peter's, St. Stephen's, Kingsbury (St. Michael's) in St. Albans itself, of Watford, Rickmansworth, Abbot's Langley, Redbourn, Codicote, St. Paul's Walden, Hexton, Newnham and Northaw in Hertfordshire and of Winslow and Aston Abbots in Buckinghamshire, were to be held entirely free from subjection to any bishop (particularly the bishop of Lincoln in whose diocese St. Albans lay). The Pope instructed that the lands within the Liberty were to be administered solely by the Abbot, who enjoyed extensive seigniorial and jurisdictional rights over his tenants - as evidenced in this volume.

The manorial court operated in two different ways, the Court of Halimote (Hall-Moot or Hallmote) was held every three weeks in a fixed place (in Norton itself or sometimes in St. Albans under a particular ash tree) and dealt with both free and unfree tenants of the Abbot in matters of tenure, rights over land and customary payments, as well as for marriage. The Court Leet or View of Frankpledge was held once, or possibly twice, a year and it was here that the Abbot could enforce his judicial rights.

The records of the Manor of Norton survive in an almost unbroken sequence from 1244, during the reign of Henry III, to 1460 (Edward IV) and are translated here together with surviving rolls from the period after 1460 down to the Abbey's dissolution in 1539. They present an invaluable source by which we can begin to reconstruct medieval society, through named families and individuals and how they dutifully performed, or more often disobeyed, the seigniorial obligations placed upon them. One miscreant with whom many of us might sympathise was a certain Alan Newman, presented to the Halimote of Norton on the Thursday following the Feast of St. Barnabas the Apostle (13 June 1325) by four named jurors. Alan had 'an old ruinous barn' and he was placed upon oath to rebuild it before the next Halimote. On 10th December of the same year we find Alan Newman is now named as one of the six jurors at the Halimote but 'has a day between this day and Michaelmas to rebuild a barn that is ruinous.' Perhaps as a juror he was able to win himself more time to carry out the repairs. On 16 October 1326 Alan was fined 2d (pence) for not observing millsuit, a seigniorial right by which he was obliged to grind his corn at the Abbey's mill. These offences were relatively slight, but the norms of society were upheld in his case, as in so many others.

This volume is a pleasure to read and mull over. Many technical terms, such as heriot (payment to inherit, perhaps a villein's best beast), leyrwite (a fine for unchastity or fornication, as the loss of virginity depreciated a lord's property), chevage (an annual payment made to a lord, in this case the Abbot, by his unfree tenants), all are clearly explained. It makes the daily lives of the medieval inhabitants of Norton more accessible to us and, by extension, brings us closer to the world that they inhabited. It is a model of how local history can and should be presented. (Hertfordshire Record Publications, vol. 29, ISBN 978-0-9565111-2-6 is available from the Society.)

Brenda Bolton

Further Records of Norton 1007-1681

A recent addition to the materials gathered regarding Norton has been published by the Norton Community Archaeology Group and deserves to be read as a companion to the earlier volume published by the Hertfordshire Record Society.

Transcriptions or translations of the many and varied documents in the book include Feet of fines, the St. Albans chronicles, legal documents of transfer, extracts from equity court cases, lists of parish officers, a large collection of wills, inventories and probate accounts.

Much of what has been transcribed provides fresh insights and, at times, paints a different view of Norton's history from that given previously in historical accounts. An example of this is the manor house, known as Norton Bury. Documentary evidence gives the earliest mention of Norton Bury in a will of 1543, but archaeological finds confirm the site is considerably older than this. Earlier documents indicate the building had once been a rectory called Hall Orchard; it is last mentioned in 1533 in a lease of the rectory rights and land. The name and function appear to have changed at the time of the dissolution.

An archaeological dig in 2003 had uncovered medieval pottery shards from the fifteenth century beneath demolished floor tiles, near to the current house at Norton Bury. This find fitted well with accounts from both the St. Albans chronicles and the manor court records which mentioned a significant investment in a house newly built for the rectory farmer at Hall Orchard, sometime between 1400-1430. Previously, historians had suggested there might be a link between Norton Bury and Hall Orchard, and now there is confirmation of this, in comparing the historical documents with the archaeological finds.

It is hoped that the publication of this volume will form a solid foundation for further research and is available from the NCAG website: nortoncommarch.com.

David Croft

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 put such information in an email to the Secretary at hfalvey1@btinternet.com

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.

NEW VOLUME

The Diary of John Carrington, Farmer of Bramfield, 1798-1810, Volume 2, 1805-1810 and John Carrington Junior's Diary, May 1810-December 1812, edited and with an Introduction by Susan Flood (Vol. XXXIII)

We are very pleased that this volume will be launched at the AGM. As it is the volume for 2017/18, those who were members for that year will be sent (or given) their membership copy; those members who have joined us since then may purchase a copy at the member's price of £17.50. The first volume (HRS Vol. XXVI) has been reprinted and is also available for £17.50.