

Chairman: Dr Alan Thomson

Secretary: Dr Heather Falvey

Treasurer: Mr Paul Cassidy

## Chairman's Report

Most of the counties in the area to the north of London and the former Middlesex have record societies that publish books and maps, as this society does. Some publish the books themselves, others employ a commercial company. Looking at the publications since 2018 gives the local historian inspiration as to what might be of interest to our readers. Hertfordshire shares borders with Greater London, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Essex, with Suffolk not far away to the north-east.

In Bucks, a volume has been published recently on *Justicing Notebooks*. These gave almost daily information about what local justices were doing to maintain law and order, as well as supervise local administration in the period before the formal establishment of petty sessions in the same part of the county. The only similarity is with the borough records in Hertford in the seventeenth century and later, in which a lot of detail exists on petty offences in the town.

The 2022 Bucks volume contains transcripts of 108 wills, and legal disputes associated with some of them, over a period of more than three centuries, from the parish of Chetwode. Some of the wills were written by local people and show how they spoke and what they cared about. Others deal with the concerns of gentry families who had substantial wealth to bequeath. Our society has published wills from both Hertford and St Albans and these have shown some of the lifestyles of inhabitants, as well as relationships between them.

Like us, Bucks and Cambs have published churchwardens' accounts, which cover the Reformation period. In all, we have three volumes of churchwardens' accounts, which tells us far more about a parish than just ongoing repairs to the church. Beds has published a collection of coroners' rolls, found both in the National Archives and in the library of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. In the Wren Library at Trinity College library, Cambridge, is a collection of documents relating to the town of Ware.

Cambs published the 1664 Hearth Tax returns some time ago and our society hopes to publish a future volume on the various Hearth Tax returns from the 1660s for Herts, although there is not a complete set across the county for any one year. However, they do give an indication of wealth or poverty, as well as the overall population of a parish.

Suffolk Records Society has published a collection of documents from one manor, Monks Eleigh, across the period 1210-1683. This allows us to glimpse details of people who lived and worked there over some four centuries, and in the earliest accounts we see the works

which the unfree tenants were obliged to carry out for the local lord. In 2014 we published the records of the manor of Norton for the period 1244-1539. It is interesting to see the similarities and differences between the ways that the manorial courts operated and details of the burdens imposed.

Looking at the publications of other record societies and indices of documents in a variety of archives online can offer inspiration for further research and publication.

**Alan Thomson**

## 2023 AGM Venue

The original British School at Hitchin, now the British Schools Museum, was founded in 1810 by William Wilshire, whose farm and garden memoranda are to be published by the Record Society this year. The oldest surviving building dates from 1837, and although hundreds of these school rooms were built in Britain and overseas, this is believed to be the only one still in existence. Another unique survival is the galleried classroom where visiting schools (and adults!) can experience a Victorian lesson. In 1857 a new Infants School and Evening School, with the Girls School above, were constructed. A modern classroom block added in 1905 is now equipped as it would have been between 1905-1938, with examples of pupils' school work.

The British Schools Museum is a charity which charges for admission and depends on volunteers to help keep it open. Hitchin is an attractive market town with a wide variety of cafes, pubs and restaurants. St Mary's church, most of which dates from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, is the largest parish church in Hertfordshire. A good starting point for exploring the town is Hitchin Information Centre, situated in Churchyard, opposite the war memorial. The recently opened North Hertfordshire Museum is in Brand Street and near the library in Paynes Park is a Physic Garden.

**Bridget Howlett**

**Review of Lionel Munby, *Hertfordshire Population Statistics, 1563-1801*, ed. Heather Falvey, 2nd edition (HRS, 2019) (previously published in *Local Population Studies*, 108, Spring 2022)**

This short but valuable book provides a comprehensive set of the surviving figures from the six main ecclesiastical surveys for the parishes of Hertfordshire in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It also includes substantial discussions of how the raw figures can be turned into credible parish-level population estimates, and of the other useful information

the original returns often contain. The first edition was authored by Lionel Munby and published in 1964, while this new edition has been updated by Heather Falvey. The update has involved adding much more systematic and detailed citations of both archival and secondary material, and a bibliography of more recent work on these sources. Furthermore, Falvey has added extra appendices with some late sixteenth-century figures for one area that were otherwise lacking, and a survey of where to find the fragmented surviving Hearth Tax returns for the country.

The main sets of figures explained and tabulated here are for the ecclesiastical inquiries of 1563 (families), 1603 (communicants), 1676 (communicants and dissenters), 1706-1723 (families and dissenters), 1749-1770 (houses and individuals), c.1790 (families, dissenters and houses), and 1801 (individuals). Almost all parishes are missing figures from one or more of these returns but, taken together, they provide a very full picture of chronological patterns. An example of the returns for a single parish provides a sense of the potential value but also the complexity of these numbers: Aldbury had 33 families in 1563; 180 communicants in 1603; 174 adults in 1676, of whom 8 were dissenters; 55 to c.60 families in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, of whom 4 or 5 were Presbyterian and 8 were Anabaptist or Quaker; 67 families around 1790, of whom 20 were dissenters; and 457 individuals in 105 families in 1801. None of the figures based on ecclesiastical surveys can be straightforwardly converted into simple population totals, but the authors ably set out the various plausible multipliers that have been used for such conversions, enabling the reader to make his or her own decision about the best method.

Although the authors present these data as ‘raw material’ for others to interpret, there is in fact a fair amount of thoughtful analysis included in the book too. Munby provides a series of population estimates for the county as a whole, compares them to Rickman’s figures drawn from parish registers, and briefly discusses the pattern of change across these centuries. He also summarises the evidence in these surveys of the geographical distribution of religious dissenters, noting for example not only the high concentration of Protestant nonconformists in Hertford, but also around Hitchin, Hemel Hempstead and Berkhamsted. The book includes a set of maps which illustrate the estimates of population and religious dissent, even if admittedly they are less visually pleasing than the version that could be produced with modern geographical information systems.

This combination of abstracted and tabulated raw figures with thoughtful interpretation and extensive information about how to learn more make this a welcome addition to the growing range of published resources on local populations at this time. Any historian working on Hertfordshire in this period, or any scholar interested in attempting comparative analysis of local populations, will benefit from this new addition.

**Brodie Waddell**

**\* Stuart Raymond, *Researching Local History: Your Guide to the Sources*, also references this HRS publication, describing it as ‘a model local study’.**

**Review of *John Carrington, Farmer of Bramfield, His Diary, 1805-1810, part 2 and John Carrington Junior’s Diary May 1810-December 1812, edited and with an introduction by Susan Flood (HRS XXXIII, 2022)* (previously published in *The Local Historian*, April 2023, vol. 53, no.2)**

This second volume of John Carrington’s diary completes this new edition that sees the full text of this excellent resource available in print for the first time, plus John junior’s continuation over the next two and a half years. The original diary source is not easy to use, largely written on the back of old official papers – tax forms, farm sale notices and inventories, official notices amongst others – piecing it together has been a major task. Sue Flood can be congratulated on the work she has done over the years, with the many people she thanks for assisting her.

Carrington was a comfortably-off farmer, a ‘John Bull’ character, and his diary records his life when he was in his 70s and 80s, still active in the community and walking and riding long distances. There is information on his farming enterprises, but much more on his activities as High Constable for the Liberty of St Albans, and tax collector, overseer of the poor for Bramfield, and treasurer of a variety of Friendly Societies in Tewin, Bramfield and Hertford. He travelled widely, and was frequently in Hertford, Ware, St Albans, Hoddesdon and London in furtherance of his business and personal interests. He also collected taxes and checked weights and measures as far afield as Lilley, Codicote and Whitwell. But most of his time was spent between Tewin (where his son ran the pub), Bramfield, Hertford and Ware. He regularly attended the Saturday market in Hertford, while he paid in the taxes he collected initially at Ware Park, later at a Ware pub. He must have been an impressive figure striding or riding around the county. In 1806 at the age of 82 he noted that he had made the walk from his Bramfield farm to Waterford and then across the fields to Ware Park in 55 minutes, a distance of 4.4 miles by my calculation. He often carried large sums of money. The amounts of tax he paid in were often between £100 and £250, yet only once was he successfully attacked by footpads, when he was lame, after falling off a ladder. Even so they only took his wallet, missing the £20 he had hidden.

John Carrington was a self-taught man who valued knowledge of a wider world and ensured that his children received the education he had missed. He was of that group of people Susan Whyman has described as ‘rough diamonds’ for their contribution to the inquisitive spirit of enterprise that made eighteenth century England so dynamic. His grandchildren were both at (boarding) school at Welwyn. His place in the community allowed him free access to all social classes. The local aristocracy dealt with him directly on occasion, though he spent more time gossiping with their estate stewards and housekeepers. Professionals consulted him when

appropriate. He played a key role in the Friendly Societies, and was a generous and compassionate overseer of the poor, having a drink with the poorhouse inmates and inviting all the poor to dinner in his house at Christmas. When he found underweight bread on his travels in the county to check weights and measures, he confiscated and distributed it amongst the local poor. He was found at every local event and feast and spent much time in the taverns and ale-houses of the locality, achieving the status of a local notable. It is not surprising that more than 1,000 people attended his funeral. That life in the community is fully celebrated in the diary.

John Carrington's home life is almost entirely absent. He began the diary after the death of his wife, when his unmarried daughter kept house for him, and his younger son William did much of the work on the farm. They are shadowy figures in the diary, rarely mentioned, and never with any emotion or affection. Both married only after their father died. Much more time is devoted to the elder son (14 years older), who lived with his wife and children in Tewin, where Carrington had spent his younger years, and where John junior kept the pub. The diary contains interesting information about John senior's farming methods and attitudes, but is much less forthcoming than many farmers' diaries.

John Carrington junior began his diary at the death of his father in May 1810, but it stops abruptly for no clear reason in December 1812. It is written in a much neater hand and in standard notebooks, rather than rough scraps and paper. Its range is much more limited, but it has its own merits. There is much more about the farming year, when tasks took place and how much was sown or reaped. It also provides insights into the generational transition. John junior seems to have continued collecting taxes in his father's place for the duration of the diary and assisted his brother at Bacons Farm with the sale of his father's goods and keeping the farm going. There are interesting descriptions of journeys to Cambridge and St Neots to visit friends. It was well worth adding to the edition.

Sue Flood's edition is enriched by a helpful glossary of terms, a full index of places and people, and endpapers that helpfully provide the Carrington family tree at one end, and a contemporary map centred on his residence at Bacons Farm in Bramfield at the other. Carrington's will, dividing his goods equally between his sons and daughter and making them all executors, is printed in full, together with other relevant documents. For fuller background on many participants in the diary, the reader will need to refer back to the brief biographies in Volume 1, and for further information on the many pubs and clubs that Carrington frequented during his travels. The introduction to Volume 2 is relatively short, but useful. To take it further would have required an additional companion volume comparable to that accompanying the edition of Samuel Pepys's diary published in the 1970s. Carrington's diary does not have the same detail or national importance as Pepys, but it is much more varied than many diaries of its kind. It provides valuable insights into the lives of the

'middling sort' that apply anywhere across lowland England at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

**John Broad**

Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies supplied this remarkable image from the Kitchin map of the 1780s of Bramfield, a bucolic scene of haymaking maybe, but one that indicates its importance as a farming community during the time of Carrington's tenancy.



The area, still comprising a considerable amount of farmland today, is cited in *Footpath Walks in Mid Herts* (ed. David Whiskin, 1997). The four-mile walk around Bramfield described in the booklet includes Bacons Farm which, it notes, was 'the home of John Carrington, 1726-1810, author of a well-known rural diary and sometimes known as the Hertfordshire Pepys'.

**Anne-Marie Ford**

### ***William Wilshere's Hitchin Garden and Farm, 1809-1824***

William Wilshere (1754-1824) was a Hitchin lawyer. On his death William Lucas, a Hitchin brewer, malster and farmer, described him as: 'The most eminent public character of this town and neighbourhood. He began life with but little property, but by his address, assiduity and superior abilities, soon rose into great practice in his profession as an attorney and steward to copyhold courts, by which he acquired much wealth and influence. For several years he had relinquished practice – and, being appointed a magistrate, he distinguished himself by his sound judgement and usefulness in that station and was, of late, Chairman to the Quarter Sessions of Bedford. He was a man of great prudence and sagacity – of polished manners and kept an elegant establishment, both in house and gardens and was very kind to the poor, who have in him lost a good friend.' In his later years Wilshere farmed about 120 acres of land, mainly to the east of Hitchin, and mainly cultivated arable crops.

Transcripts of the two volumes of Wilshere's Farm and Gardening Memoranda, covering the years 1808 to 1824, are to be published this autumn by Hertfordshire Record Society, with an introduction by Bridget Howlett

and Tom Williamson. These constitute an unusual and important source for students of both agricultural and garden history; indeed, few surviving journals or notebooks from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries manage to include an account of both the farming *and* the horticultural activities of a particular individual. What will make this volume particularly useful is that it will include plans showing land occupied by Wilshire, drawn up in c.1808 and 1818, which, with other evidence, allows the activities described to be planned within a secure spatial frame.

The notes on Wilshire's farming are particularly interesting for the light they shed, not simply on up-to-date agriculture on the Hertfordshire chalklands in the early nineteenth century (inviting comparisons with William Ellis's activities at Great Gaddesden a century earlier), but also because Wilshire was clearly farming with an eye to the local urban market and thus grew not only wheat, barley and fodder crops, but also large quantities of crops like carrots and potatoes, while pigs and poultry all loom large, aspects of contemporary agriculture all too frequently ignored by historians. The wealth of varieties named, especially of potatoes, is unusual and highly informative. Wilshire's comments on such things as the cultivation of canary seed, and on keeping turkeys, are also of some significance, not only in the context of Hertfordshire, but also more widely.

Garden historians will also find much to interest them. As well as providing useful lists of varieties (including fruit varieties), Wilshire also notes the local and London-based nurseries from which his plants were obtained. This information can, by remarkable good fortune, be combined with the journal kept by his gardener, James Bowie, from 1812 until 1814, and with a list of 'trees, seeds etc., sown and planted in the garden of William Wilshire, Esq., at Hitchin, Herts., by James Bowie 1813'. James Bowie left Wilshire in August 1814, when he was sent by Sir James Banks on a plant hunting expedition to Brazil. Both volumes were continued spasmodically by later gardeners. Two bills listing plants supplied by Robert Murray of Hertford and Henry Hodgson of Hitchin will also be included in this volume. Together these sources provide vital insights into the gardening activities of a middle-class individual at a time when most of our sources for garden history relate to the properties of large landowners.

The volume will also include biographical notes of local people mentioned in the diaries, glossary, bibliography and comprehensive indexes of names, places and subjects, as well as full colour images of the maps.

**Bridget Howlett  
Tom Williamson**

## **New Bank Account**

The Society has recently moved the bank account to Lloyds Bank, which offers much improved services and terms. Members who pay their subscriptions by Standing Order will therefore need to update the instructions to their bank. Details are below.

If you have not previously thought about paying your subscription by Standing Order, why not consider it now? The Society would strongly encourage you to adopt this payment method, as:

\* Your membership will automatically renew every year with no further action required from you.

\*The Society's administration will be simplified since we will no longer need to issue reminders, with the attendant costs in both time and postage (the latter is now a meaningful share of the membership fee). We can also plan our annual finances better, knowing how much money the Society can expect to receive at the start of each membership year. You can cancel your Standing Order at any time if you wish to resign membership.

Should you need to contact us when details such as your address, e-mail or telephone number change, this can be done by contacting the Honorary Secretary by e-mail to [info@hrsociety.org.uk](mailto:info@hrsociety.org.uk) or by post to 119 Winton Drive, Croxley Green, Rickmansworth WD3 3QS.

The details of our new bank account:

Bank:	Lloyds Bank PLC
Account Name:	Hertfordshire Record Society
Sort Code:	30-96-26
Account No:	80093968
Reference:	Your surname

**Subscriptions are due on 1 April each year and remain unchanged at £17.50 per annum.**

If you have any questions please contact the Honorary Treasurer, Paul Cassidy, by e-mail to: [treasurer@hrsociety.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@hrsociety.org.uk)

## **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.