

S.A.L.H.S

website: www.salhs.org.uk

Stanstead Abbotts Local History Society

Issue 32

Editor—Terry Collins

October 2019

The Pagoda at Kew Gardens

For our September meeting we were pleased to welcome back Dr. Lee Prosser, from Historic Royal Palaces, who spoke to us last year about Hunsdon House, with his talk on the Chinese Pagoda in Kew Gardens.

Lee explained that the Pagoda was built in 1762 for the Princess Augusta, mother of George III, by Sir William Chambers who had spent time travelling around the Far East studying architecture. It was a very popular 'folly' of its age, even if it did involve climbing 254 stairs, and enjoyed one of the finest views across London. The pagoda has 10 floors and is 50 metres high (164 feet) this is rather unusual as a pagoda normally has an odd number of floors.

Before any work could take place there was a vast amount of research to be undertaken in order to get the pagoda in a condition suitable for it to be used by the public. When it was built one of its most important and endearing features were the 80 dragons which were installed on each floor of the Pagoda which were made from gilded wood. These were removed in about 1784, rumour has it that their sale helped to pay off George III's

gambling debts as they were made of gold but in reality they were only made from wood and had succumbed possibly because they were considered too heavy for the rooves.



The Pagoda as it looks today

The decision had been taken to try to get the pagoda looking as it would have been when it was first completed in the late 18th Century. There were no eye witness accounts of the pagoda's design and much relied on the paintings and etchings of William Marlow and the original drawings of Sir William Chambers the architect. Almost everything had to be rebuilt or replaced both inside and outside the building. At least 30 people were involved in the conservation work ranging from painters to wood carvers and metal smiths. Paint analysis had shown that the roofs of the pagoda

were not red as they looked before work started but originally green and striped. The wood used in the 18th century was shown to have come from forests in Sweden and so that's where the new wood also comes from.

Replacing the dragons was the most difficult part of the conservation programme as the originals being of wood would be too heavy. It was decided to carve 8 of the dragons from wood, for the first roof and the remainder were made by 3D printing in a polyimide material 2-4 mm thick. To ensure they would not fall off they were tested before their installation in a BAE wind tunnel and thankfully they did not move and stayed put.

The final part of the installation was the painting of all 80 dragons and this was a mixture of traditional painting and modern technology that involved relearning how they made paint in the eighteenth century.

When all was finished there was one last thing, as the pagoda has 10 floors in China this is an unlucky number and to overcome this a master monk from Nanking came to bless the building, circling the pagoda chanting and bestowing luck for the building.

After answering a number of questions Lee was warmly applauded by an appreciative audience.

Terry Collins

The Seven Martyrs of St Albans

September saw the visit of Rory Young, sculptor and painter who is based in Cirencester, with his talk about the Seven Martyrs of St Albans, a group of stone statues placed in empty niches in the fourteenth century nave screen that have transformed the views that visitors have when they enter the cathedral from the West front. Rory had entered a competition in 2009 with ten others and was fortunately chosen the winner. His design was based on medieval figures that were coloured, a style of ecclesiastical sculpture not used since the middle ages. Between 2010-2012 several models were made and presented for approval which was granted in December 2012. The seven martyrs are from different eras of Christian history and from all parts of the world. Rory worked closely with the Dean of the Cathedral, the Very Reverend Dr. Jeffrey John on the overall design of the statues, which were a gift from long time friends of the Cathedral Richard and Susan Walduck.

Rory's research took almost three years and the first group of figures were made of polystyrene but the finished items were stone, but not just any stone, Rory wanted to use Caen limestone from France which is what was used in the Middle Ages, and on many English Cathedrals such as Canterbury and Westminster. The polystyrene models were fitted into their appropriate niche in the screen to ensure they fitted precisely after previously having painted the niche in red. To carve the figures from stone by hand would have taken many months but by using modern technology and computer operated drilling machines the basic shapes and designs for each one were done in a week after having spent three days preparing the computer programmes

At this stage of the project each of the statues, now full size weighed almost a tonne. In order to reduce the weight they were hollowed out which also helped the stone to dry. For example the nun's habit is hollowed out as are the palm fronds some of the statues are holding. Using acrylic paint the statues were carefully



Rory Young Painting the statue of St Alban



The statues of the Seven Martyrs

painted, a process which took all of five months. The finished set of figures were finally put into position in April 2015.

There is even a touch of mysticism to round things off. As Rory was finishing carving the eyes of Elizabeth of Russia a Large Emerald moth flew in and settled on the statue, like a lapel broche where it refused to move. Rory later found photographs of Elizabeth wearing a jewelled butterfly shaped pin.

But who were the seven martyrs, from left to right in the picture, above right, they are;

1. Oscar Romero -Archbishop of El Salvador who was assassinated in 1980 while celebrating Mass.
2. St Alban Roe - a Roman Catholic who was hanged for treason in St Albans Abbey Gatehouse for being a Catholic priest in 1642.
3. St Amphibalus - a Christian priest given shelter by Alban in the third century AD when Christianity was still proscribed.
4. St Alban -Britain's first saint a citizen of Roman Verulamium martyred by the Romans on the site of the present day Cathedral.
5. George Tankerfield -a Protestant burnt to death in 1555 in Romeland overlooking St Albans Abbey.
6. St Elizabeth Romanova - Granddaughter of Queen Victoria who married into the Russian Orthodox family and converted to the Russian Orthodox Church. She became a nun and Abbess and was killed by the Bolsheviks in 1918.
7. Dietrich Bonhoeffer-Lutheran pastor and theologian imprisoned in a concentration camp for his opposition to the Nazis, he was tried and hanged in 1945.

Terry Collins

By now all of you will have been made aware that our society's Honorary President, Ron Dale, has passed away. You can read his obituary on the SALHS web site. As a tribute to him I have included one of Ron's articles about his love of research in this issue, page 3.

Research and Time Travelling by Ron Dale

The more I research into the history of our little corner of Hertfordshire, the more I realise how little we know about its past. And the more I discover about its past, the more I discover how much more there is to discover. It is like peeling an onion, only to find another layer underneath and then another layer and then another *ad infinitum*.

And the more I delve into the past, the more enjoyable, the more exciting research becomes, for there are moments when you suddenly discover something unexpectedly interesting about the village. Sitting at my laptop at the kitchen table which serves as my desk, It might just be a name or an event, but it is somehow like treasure hunting without leaving home; where you suddenly discover something precious, but the jewel or the treasure is not silver or gold, just some everyday piece of information you did not know, and nobody you know knows either. When you find this discovery to be exciting and pleasurable, you realise that you have become a time-traveller due to the magic of the internet and all that you ever wanted to know is there, somewhere in the land of nowhere, just waiting to be plucked out of the past. You have become hooked on research and cannot wait to find those little gems of knowledge which mean so little to the average person, but so much to the searcher after knowledge.

Finding the existence of William Rokesburgh and son, possibly early residents of Stanstead Bury for example, gave me such a buzz, such excitement because I knew that this knowledge was not known to anyone else in the village, was not written down in any Hertfordshire history book and that for the first time the story could be written down and told to those who wish to know for the rest of eternity, long after my demise. And so it was with the location of the Saxon site, Alwine's Frith home of Sir Simon de Stanstede (another character not previously recorded in history books), which he rented from our lord of the manor, Roger de Wanchy, the man who put the village into debt and into the hands of Waltham Abbey. It was also possibly once the home of our Saxon lord Alwine and was certainly owned by him. And then, after discovering the site at home, thanks to a kind friend with a car and an interest in Easneye (as I am no longer able to walk much), to stand next to a pond on this small 10-acre plot of land and to be there with my friend Ray 'Dick' Dixon at the spot where these early important people one stood 800 to 1,000 years ago gives an indescribable feeling. Somehow to uncover this little story, merely a few boring facts to most people, gives me a thrill which makes all the eye-strain, all the searching worthwhile. To me it is like finding treasure, and hopefully if just one other person can appreciate this

fact, then it will have been worth the effort. The search for knowledge about the past is a worthy one to those who can appreciate it. And the rewards it gives cannot be measured except subjectively and only by the discoverer. Probably nine out of ten people reading this mass of village facts on our web-site will skim over it with little thought or feeling, un-realising the pleasure it has given to someone else to find it. Of course I realise that for many readers, such discoveries mean little, but so it will always be. For every page printed online, you can guarantee I have read twenty others needlessly. But research has not been work for me. It has been a great pleasure and an experience I would not have missed. Naturally, there is still much more to learn in the future and I believe the answers will be found on early documents in local archives such as at HALS or the National Archives, as few documents are accessible online and the earlier ones will need to be translated from the Latin text, so brush up on your Latin. Wonderful as it is, a world of knowledge at our fingertips, there is a limit to what we can discover on the internet.

THE PAST IS A MUCH SMALLER PLACE THAN YOU MIGHT IMAGINE

In historical research, one interesting facet is that some of the characters we investigate would have known each other. Their paths would have crossed. William Rokesburgh, citizen of Stanstead Abbots in the early 1400s knew Sir Richard (Dick) Whittington and did business with him as both their names have appeared together on Feet of Fines documents regarding land purchases. (*Oh yes he did!*) It is also just possible that in the early 15th century Sir Andrew Ogard might have met Rokesburgh when he was building Rye House with Stanstead Bury less than a mile away. Rokesburgh is buried at St. James. And so it was with Izaak Walton, our '*Brother of the Angle*.' He was fond of fishing at Rye House where he admitted to a favourite fishing spot there. Although he would not have known Dr. Alexander Nowell, Dean of St. Pauls personally, Izaak mentions that he spoke to people who had known the good doctor of Much Hadham and he was told that he usually gave away his catch of fish to the poor of Stanstead or wherever he was fishing. And of course we have already encountered Dr. Nowell as the close friend of Jocosa Frankland, lady of the manor of Thele and Rye House who consoled her when her son William was killed by a horse. And being the clever fisherman that he was, Dr. Nowell was credited as being the first man to chill his beer on hot summer days by sinking a bottle in the river whilst fishing. (How could anyone possibly know this!). *The past is a much smaller place than you can imagine; once you travel back there regularly you never know who you are going to meet!*

RAF HURRICANE AT OLIVES FARM

On Friday 30th August 1940 20 year old Pilot Officer P/O John Ellacombe carried out a forced landing in his Hurricane at Olives Farm after an exchange of fire with a Heinkel bomber. He had been flying in the skies over Stanstead Abbots at about 15,000 feet in company with other 151 squadron Hurricanes when they encountered 10 Heinkel 111 bombers. The head on attack on the enemy bombers took place in the late afternoon with P/O Ellacombe beginning to fire his guns at a distance of 2,000 yards and continued to fire until the last minute before diving his plane beneath the lead German aircraft. As he did so the boss of his propeller was hit by an enemy round damaging the gear train just behind the propeller spinner. It became quickly evident a forced landing was inevitable and he looked out for the largest field he could hurriedly land on. His choice was the 60 acre field at Olives Farm upon which he landed, with no further damage to the aircraft.



As the pilot climbed out of the cockpit a rather angry farm labourer rapidly approached carrying a pitchfork and shouting abuse at the “German” pilot. This man was a Mr Mayes one of several farmworkers who along with members of the Palmer family of Olives Farm had watched the Hurricane land. Despite the large RAF roundels on the Hurricane Mr Mayes proceeded to chase the pilot round and round the plane, intent on harpooning him with the pitchfork. This chase only stopped when other farm workers reached the plane and physically stopped Mr Mayes. After some rebuke for Mr Mayes and some apologies to John Ellacombe they made their way across the fields to the farmhouse at

Olives Farm. The Palmer family made him very welcome and no doubt plied him with tea whilst he waited for an RAF car to take him back to his base at Stapleton Tawney.

Stuart Moye

The SALHS Committee

Chairman/Public Relations
Bob Hunt

Secretary
Lynne Heraud

Treasurer
Glenis Collins

Archivist/Historian
Ray Dixon

Archivist/Facebook
Andrea Coppen

Newsletter /Vice Chair
Terry Collins

Parish Council Rep
Julia Davies

Committee Members:
Linda Gifford
Gerald Coppen
Rob Gifford
John Lloyd
Rosemary James

Website Manager
Brian Johnson

General enquiries email
Admin@salhs.org.uk

Data Protection Act

In accordance with the above act we have to advise that the Society holds information on computer in respect of each member. This information is used for routine membership purposes only and remains confidential.

Forthcoming events

November	8th	2019	Hoddesdon from Saxons to Supermarkets Sue Garside
December	13th	2019	Xmas Party (Members only)
January	10th	2020	History of Much Hadham by Michael Clark
February	14th	2020	Policing in Hertfordshire by Nik Pringle
March	13th	2020	The Stort Story by Richard Thomas
April	3rd	2020	Timber Framed Buildings by Helen Gibson

Unless stated otherwise all meetings are at the Parish Hall at 7.30pm
Members Free. Non Members £2 Tea, Coffee and biscuits included