

# S.A.L.H.S

website: [www.salhs.org.uk](http://www.salhs.org.uk)

*Stanstead Abbotts Local History Society*

**Issue 36**

Editor—Terry Collins

## Becoming a House Detective

**October 2020**

Our September Zoom presentation was by Stephen Poulter, who many of you will remember ran the Hoddesdon bookshop until a few years ago when he moved to Norfolk. Stephen now lives in the small village of Needham which is in the south of the county, in a Grade 2 listed cottage dating from the 17th century. He looks upon himself not as the owner of the cottage but as its custodian, the latest in a long line of occupants.

It is a timber framed building with lots of wooden beams and they are all original but some of them were not found until the 20th century as they had been covered when an extension to the building was built. It is quite possible that the frame of the building was built locally as there was a joiner/carpenter in the village. It would have been built then dismantled and transported on carts and then reassembled at its destination. Many of the beams that were used bear so called carpenters marks which show how the pieces fit together. Stephen's house also has a number of "witches marks" which were carved into the wood above any doors, windows and fireplaces and were supposed to keep out evil spirits. Stephen was told that some of the beams were in fact a ship's timber but this proved to be false.

There remains only one original Mullion window above the front door, a style which dates back to the middle ages. It dates back to the 17th century. The largest window in the cottage however is at the rear of the property and is an Oriel window normally set in the

front of a property, so making the house back to front.

Stephen said that when researching a property one should begin by looking for clues within the house itself and then start with the county archives. He is fortunate as much of the archive material for Norfolk has now been digitised and is online. The first document that he examined was the first published guide to Norfolk towns and villages it was published in 1806 and was written by the vicar



Stephen Poulter's Cottage

of the next village. In the early 20th century a small booklet called Needham Notes was published written by a local resident the first history of the village. This listed Mr Joseph Johnson, a farmer as the occupant of the cottage. He then moved on to look at local tithe maps from about 1840, which told him that although Mr Johnson lived at the cottage it was owned by John Kemp. At the time of the first census the cottage was still occupied by the Johnson family, Joseph, his wife Esther and two sons. By 1851 Joseph had died and Esther was running the farm and their son Robert was described as a bricklayer. As many houses were now being built of brick and mortar

and not timber framed there would have been lots of work for him. Ordinance Survey maps showed there was a brick kiln locally and brick making carried on for many years into the 20th century. In 1866 Robert Johnson took out a mortgage for £50 and became the owner. And 10 years later he was able to vote as he owned property valued in excess of £12. By 1891 he was still there with his wife Caroline and five children. Robert died in 1896. It was discovered after his death that he had in fact taken out two other mortgages and had paid over £200 but was only paying off only the interest and none of the capital. The 1901 census shows that his son, also Robert, was now living there and he eventually sold the cottage in 1927.

Stephen wanted to look further back in his searches and managed to discover that from the middle ages there were 5 manors covering the village of Needham and its neighbouring little village of Brockdish. From studying these manorial rolls Stephen now believes that the cottage was built around 1620.

*Terry Collins*



St Peter's Church Needham  
Note the round tower

## ODD POTS AND FOREIGNERS

Our October meeting, again on Zoom saw the welcome return of Keith Fitzpatrick Matthews with a talk with an intriguing title. The Odd Pots refer to the ceramics made in the years following the collapse of Roman rule from Britain in the early fifth century.

This period of history is generally referred to as 'The Dark Ages' and is supposedly the time of the reign of King Arthur when Roman Britain became England. It was a time of political and economic turmoil with lots of foreign immigrants. Unfortunately there is little in the way of written documents from the period, but we do have a lot of pots of varying types.

In the 1880's the remains of a Roman villa were discovered in California Road, Baldock, at the time it was unique in Eastern England. It was unusual in that the ruins contained a large amount of Roman type pots not seen before 400AD. Some of them were rather crude and were copies of Roman pots, among the items found were miniatures small enough to fit into one's palm and matching sets of jugs and cups. Any of the items were of a type not seen before, what he calls 'odd pots' as they did not resemble other types previously found. Why were these items at Baldock? Pottery manufacture did not end with the collapse of Roman rule but payment of goods was difficult if there was a shortage of coins and so with the Romans either gone or settled the main customer base for the potters had gone. But they still continued to produce and innovate by copying Roman style ceramics even into the 5th and 6th centuries.

In 2013 Keith was contacted by Robin Fleming a Historian Professor from Boston College and the author of 'Britain after Rome, the fall and rise, 400– 1070' They decided to hold a conference where History and Archolo-



Romano British Narrow Necked Pot



5th Century Warrior of the type found at Sutton Hoo

gy comes together called 'A thing of the past', and it took place in 2015, in Ann Arbor Michigan. Robin had identified a number of sites in the UK where similar artefacts had been found ranging from the North to the South West. Keith was starting to look at sites within Hertfordshire and had found a number of items including a studded jar in Hitchin from a Saxon warrior from 5th Century and a lidded jar at Foxholes, near Hertford.

What does this pottery tell us about the end of Roman Britain, with rapid collapse and political chaos? There was a phase of transition in ceramics which saw a mixture of Romano/Britain and Anglo Saxon pottery. The variations in the materials, Romans tempered the clay with chaff and the Saxons used sand, together with increasing incompetence of the potters, some didn't have any idea about how to even make a pot. And the failure of technology, fast wheels no longer being repaired and the kilns not being maintained.

Stuart Laycock, author of 'Britannia: the failed state', states that archaeologists need to label the materials they dealt with into meaningful categories. So wheel thrown pottery is usually classed as Romano/British and hand made pottery is Anglo Saxon but they have been shown to overlap. The pots tell us that wheel thrown vessels continued for a generation after 400AD but at reducing rates due to the failing technology, from 450AD potters were no longer well trained but their technology survived until at least the sixth century. This was the transitional period which saw the demise of Roman Britannia and the very beginning of Saxon England.

Keith closed the evening answering a number of questions from the online audience.

*Terry Collins*

## SOUTH STREET EARLY HISTORY

In 1840 the area we know today as South Street was two grassy fields separated by drainage channels. The channels were part of an extensive system of drainage which covered much of the flood plain and were culverted under the High Street. Remnants of this once extensive drainage system can still be seen near the entrance to the boatyard at the bottom of South Street. The long narrow grassy field through which South Street was to be built was rented by William Smith who lived almost directly opposite this field on the other side of the High Street. The field would have most likely been used for the grazing of either cattle or sheep. In the early 1860s the gated entrance to the field from the High Street was used to create the start of a short dirt track that led a short way down to the first house built in South Street.

Later in the 1860s the road that was to become South

Street was formed as a dirt road down the right hand side of the field. A drainage channel once acting as a field boundary now ran close to the new road. Houses at this time were therefore only built on the left hand side of the road with at first just a few detached house near the top end of the street. Terraced houses were later erected further down on the left hand side, all being

completed by 1872. These house had sizeable back gardens which stretched right to another drainage channel that had formed the left hand boundary to the long thin field. Opposite the front of the houses on the other side of the dirt road was a stream lined with attractive trees and bushes. This was to be for the next 30 years a wonderful summer playground for the children who lived in the street. With fields and trees to the front and rear people living in these houses must have had a real sense of living in the countryside even though the High Street was only a short walk away.

This new residential street was first known as New Road until the official name of South Street was decided upon in the early 1880s. In the next few years the residents saw the provision of sewer and town gas main pipes laid under the road. However the tenants in South Street had to rely on the willingness of their landlords to

pay for the connection of their particular house to the new services. It was usual for an increase in rent to follow when a landlord did eventually pay for these improvements. At least they all benefitted from the two new street gaslights that were provided. Quite serious consideration was given to the supply of fresh piped water, to replace the communal pumps located in some back gardens. However this was not carried out and residents had to wait until 1938 before this was done. The terraced houses themselves were built fairly cheaply with low cost bricks and much salvaged material from much older buildings. This was noticeable in the doors, windows and metal fittings. Some of the doors showing signs of having been turned upside down and back to front with the positions of previous door knobs and hinges noticeably visible beneath the paint

Later in the C19<sup>th</sup> the Atkins family bought the field on the undeveloped side of South Street and built the chemists shop at the junction with the High street. Just after the turn of the century they built a line of terraced houses on the right hand side of South Street retaining part of the land nearest their shop for their

own use. The building of these homes involved the removal of the attractive trees and the culverting of the drainage channel under the new footpath. These newer houses were regarded by residents as much better built than the earlier terraced houses on the opposite side of the road. The completion of these houses saw the end of new house building in South Street for some 70 years.

The road itself was to remain a dirt road dotted with puddles in the winter for the same amount of time. Despite some limited new build and a few C19<sup>th</sup> homes replaced with modern houses overall South Street's Victorian and Edwardian heritage remains much in evidence today.

*Stuart Moye*

(A fuller account of the early history of South Street can be found on the society's website.)



**South Street from the High Street end taken in about 1905 after the then new houses on the right hand side had been built**



## Stage Coaches at Stanstead Abbots

Stanstead Abbots was not located on a major road and so had only a limited stagecoach service. The parishes of St Margaret's and Great Amwell however did witness many stagecoaches passing through on the Old North Road as they travelled from Hoddesdon to Ware via Amwell Cross Roads. Many of those coaches were long distance fast coaches rushing from London to as far away as Edinburgh. However down in the valley in Stanstead Abbots and along the lower Hoddesdon Road in St Margaret's stagecoaches were much less frequent and more sedate in their progress.

From the 1770s to 1840 there were two stagecoach services that passed through Stanstead's Main Street, which after paying the toll at the river bridge, turned south onto the Hoddesdon Road in St Margaret's. One of these coaches started at 7am from the Red Lion in Much Hadham calling at Widford and Hunsdon before picking up passengers at the Pied Bull in Stanstead at about 7.50 am. This coach reach London no earlier than 11 am. The time taken for the journey being much reliant on the weather and the state of the roads. The daily return trip set out at 4 pm from London dropping off passengers at the Pied Bull between 7 pm and 7.30 pm in good weather. Roydon had a handful of coaches that originated at what is known today as Old Harlow which having passed through Roydon crossed into Hertfordshire and headed for the Old Church of St James in Stanstead. They then turned down the Toll

Road to Rye House and Hoddesdon on the way to London.

One coach however, that passed through Roydon at about 7.35 am, went through Stanstead calling at the Pied Bull, the return daily trip departing London at 4 pm. Whichever of the two coaches a local resident caught at the Pied Bull it meant a minimum of 11 hours away from Stanstead with at least 6 hours and 20 minutes of travelling time for a maximum of 5 hours in London. Not surprisingly the rich folk who could enjoy such luxuries as travelling by stagecoach rarely returned the same day. All was to change in September 1840 when the railway opened to Broxbourne with a travelling time to London of just under the hour at about half the fare of the stagecoach. The Hadham and the Roydon coaches then ran an hour later and only travelled as far as Broxbourne decanting their passengers into the trains. In the evening they met the train that departed London at 4pm for the return journey back through Stanstead. Roydon Station opened in 1841 and St Margaret's in 1843 giving direct access to London by train.

The Roydon coach ceased to run in 1841 and the Hadham Coach was cut back to serve trains at St Margaret's Station in 1843. The Hadham coach, now hauled by two horses not four as previously, no longer had any need to pick up passengers at the Pied Bull. This marked the end of the association of an Inn in Stanstead Abbots with a stagecoach service. This arrangement lasted 20 years until the Buntingford Line opened and the Hadham Stagecoach ceased to run. Thus after about 90 years the stagecoach services to the village of Stanstead Abbots came to an end.

*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 13th 2020 From Flanders Field to the Tower by  
Richard Thomas **(This will be a Zoom meeting)**

December 11th 2020 History of Theobalds Park by Stephen  
Poulter **(This will be a Zoom meeting)**

January 8th 2021 T.B.A

For Zoom meetings you will be given log in details nearer the date.