

S.A.L.H.S

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Stanstead Abbotts Local History Society

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Editor—Terry Collins

From Flanders Fields to the Tower

January 2021

Our November Zoom meeting saw the return of Richard Thomas, who spoke to us about the history of the poppy and how it came to be used as a symbol for Remembrance Day. It all began with John McCrae's poem '*In Flanders Fields*'. Which he wrote in May 1915 after the death of a friend, Alexis Helmer who was aged just 22. McCrae was a Canadian brigade surgeon serving in 1 Brigade



John McCrae

Canadian Field Artillery and when he wrote his poem he was stationed near Ypres at Essex Farm where he was working in a forward dressing station when he noticed that there were red Corn Poppies growing between graves on a ravaged battlefield. McCrae was transferred to a hospital near Boulogne where he served until January 1918 when he died of pneumonia.

Across the Atlantic an American woman, Mona Michael was so moved by McCrae's poem that in 1918 she wrote a poem called '*We Shall Keep the Faith*' in response and was determined to make the red poppy a permanent feature of remembrance. She bought 25 artificial poppies and gave them to

her colleagues where she worked. In 1920 it was adopted by the American legion as their remembrance symbol. Mona Michael carried on her work for charity until her death in 1948.

In France the work was carried on by another woman, Anna Guerin a teacher and fundraiser, she toured the USA during and shortly after the First World War.

In 1921 she made arrangements for the American and French Children's League to distribute over a million silk poppies from France. She then moved on to Canada in 1922 and by the next year most Canadian poppies were being made by disabled Canadian veterans.

Great Britain was next to receive Anna Guerin, she arrived in August 1921 at Liverpool and contacted the British who were rather sceptical of the Poppy Day idea to begin with but by the end of September they were making poppies at Lady Haig's poppy factory. Anna continued her work across the world going to Australia and New Zealand and back to the USA. She tried to visit the USA twice a year for many years and she and her sister opened an antique shop in New York. She spent her remaining years between America and France and died in Paris in 1961 aged 83.

Meanwhile back in England a new figure had appeared on the scene, George Howson. An ex Army Major He had founded the Disabled Society with the aim of providing work for wounded ex servicemen. He had bought a factory in the Old Kent Road and from there 50 disabled ex servicemen produced a million poppies within two months. By 1925 they were making 25 million poppies annually and had outgrown the fac-

tory and so in 1926 they moved to new premises in Richmond, a disused brewery. Howson also built housing on the site for the workforce which by 1932 had swollen to 150 and increased to 350 in its heyday. Howson continued to run the business until his death from pancreatic cancer in June 1936. His coffin was taken to the factory and every member of staff took his turn to stand for an hour in silent vigil over the coffin.

Blood Red Sands and Seas of Red was the title given to the display of ceramic poppies at the Tower of London in 2014. Created by Paul Cummins and Tom Piper it consisted of 888,246 [representing one for each British and Colonial soldiers who died in World War 1] ceramic poppies made in Derbyshire and Stoke On Trent varying in length from 50cm to 1metre. They were planted by volunteers and remained until 11th November 2018. Every evening from 1st September until 10th November a reader, either a Yeoman Warder or a guest would read out 180 names chosen by the public followed by the Last Post bugle call. When the poppies were removed they were all packed and despatched to those lucky enough to have been chosen to receive them. In total almost £14 million was raised for service charities and almost 5 million visitors saw the installation.

Terry Collins



Theobalds Park

Stephen Poulter was our zoom speaker for December with his second part of his story of Theobalds Palace. You may remember that Stephen gave us the first part of the story back in 2015.

He began with a brief resume of the history of the Palace in Tudor times when the Palace was owned by Sir William Cecil, Queen Elizabeth's former Secretary of State. He held it until his death in 1598 when ownership passed to his son Robert. During this period the Queen visited the house and stayed overnight, she was not very pleased with it however and Cecil decided on a number of improvements which took 7 years to complete. They met with the Queen's approval however as she stayed 5 more times.

When James 1 came to the throne he wanted the house as a hunting lodge as he was passionate for hunting. The King suggested to Cecil that if he gave him Theobald Palace then Cecil could have Hatfield Palace which he duly did. After the execution of Charles 1st parliamentary troops took over the house and stripped it of all furnishings and fittings leaving the house a wreck

In 1660 following the Restoration the estate was passed to George Monk until in 1763 it was sold to George Prescott a successful merchant who built a new house in 1768, even using some of the bricks from the original Palace. He also built 5 gentry houses and called them Theobalds Square in what was the gardens of the palace, only two of these remain.

Moving into the nineteenth century, in 1840 the house was rented by Sir Henry Meux 1st Baronet, owner of the Horseshoe brewery in London. His wife Elizabeth Mary gave birth to a son, also Henry, in 1817. The 1st Baronet died in 1841 and the title passed to his son, who began to make extensive renovations to Theobalds House and when he had finished his work the house had 28 servants to run it. He was expected to make a good match and to do so he married Lady Louisa Caroline Brudenell-Bruce in January 1856, and soon after she produced a son who was named Henry Bruce. A few years later Sir Henry senior had a mental breakdown and went insane and his brother took over the running of the brewery. At this time Lady Caroline went to France with her young son, she could not remarry as her husband was still alive.

Although young Henry Bruce went to Eton and Cambridge he was considered to be quite naïve and while staying in Brighton he met a woman named Valerie Susie Langdon, also known as Val Reece. They met in the bar

of the Horseshoe Tavern, where Valarie was a hostess and they married in secret at All Saints Church, in Marylebone in 1878. It is possible that he was blackmailed into the marriage as it was Valarie who applied for the married certificate. In 1893 the 2nd Baronet, Henry died, so Henry Bruce inherited the title to become 3rd Baronet and Valarie becomes Lady Meux. They decide to reside at Theobalds where she enlarges the building greatly and after her husband dies in 1900 she even adds a swimming pool and skating rink. She held a number of lavish dinner parties and invited members of society but only the husbands attended as society ladies did not believe Valerie to be one of their own, and she was never invited anywhere.

Valerie had her portrait painted three times by the American artist James Whistler in 1881 but maybe this was just Valerie trying to impress people. Valerie had two passions, collecting Egyptian antiquities, she produced a catalogue with over 1700 items in it, and the second was horse racing. She used the name Mr Theobalds as the owner and her horse Volodyovski won the Derby in 1901.

In an attempt to improve her status she persuaded her husbands to purchase the Old Temple Bar which was one of the gateways into the City of London. It had been carefully dismantled brick by brick to be rebuilt in the future, within the Law Courts. In total 2700 stones were moved and stored carefully. As it was still lying dormant due to the expense to rebuild Valerie used her husbands money and acquaintances to acquire it and she had it moved and rebuilt in Theobalds Park where was used as a gatehouse. Lady Valerie used the upper room in the gatehouse to entertain important guests including the Prince Of Wales and Winston Churchill. A menagerie was also added to the park later, she actually used a pair of zebra to pull her coach and could be seen driving around London with them. Three years after they purchased the Temple Bar her husband died in 1900.

During the 2nd Boer War the siege of Ladysmith made a strong impression on Valerie so much so that at her own expense she donated a battery of Naval guns that were sent direct to South Africa. She received no real thanks except from Captain Hedworth Lampton, who was Commander of the Naval Brigade at Ladysmith and they became great friends. So much so that she made him the beneficiary of her will, leaving him the whole estate when she died on 9th December 1910.

Terry Collins



Lady Valerie Meux

The Pulhams of Broxbourne 1793-1957

In January we welcomed, via zoom, a new speaker, Val Christman who spoke to us about the Pulham family and their legacy Pulham Stone. Most of us will most likely have seen some of their work without knowing it believing that it was rock and not artificial.

Val began telling us about the four generations of the Pulham family, all named James. The first of these James I was the third son of eight children and their father was a cobbler. He and a younger brother, Obidiah became apprentices with a local master builder, J. & W. Lockwood where they trained as stone modellers at which they were both very talented. James developed a Portland Stone Cement and this was used on Lockwood Castle, which was a brick building so it then gave the impression that it was solid stone.

Lockwood expanded the business to London and the Pulham brothers went with him and managed the London branch. While there they began to get commissions to make stone faces from Portland Stone Cement. Due to economic reasons Obidiah left Lockwood's and began work with Thomas Smith an Architect from Hertford, who specialised in the design and renovation of churches, one of Obidiah's projects was the building of a large folly looking like a medieval castle (Bennington Lordship) for which they needed James' help in the building and stone modelling. The project took almost 3 years and unfortunately James I died in 1838.

James II was only 18 when his father died but he took over the business after moving to Hoddesdon where his first job was in Rawdon House where he produced ceiling mouldings, fireplaces and stairs. As a result of this work he was asked to landscape the gardens of the house belonging to John Warner called Woodlands and it was here that the first Pulhamite rock made from Portland stone cement, sharp sand, grit and colouring was made in 1842.

James II built his house locally and near it a manufactory where the rock was produced, at the same time they were still working on projects for Thomas Smith. One of these involved building a rock garden with a lake and fountain. James used his stone modelling skills to construct artificial rocks from old bricks and rubble covered in Pulhamite with sculptured surfaces so that they looked like real stone. From here on he concentrated on garden design using Pulhamite and over the following years he built up an impressive list of clients including the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) at both Sandringham and Buckingham Palace. James II was able to use his modelling skills to produce vases, urns, balustrades and fountains.

During the later Victorian period the stone became very popular and they increased the range of items they produced, making arches caves and a maze.(Benington) as well as both Italian and Japanese gardens. James II brought his son James III into the business in 1865 and from then on the business was known as James Pulham and Son as the company continued to expand considera-



Pulhamite Maze at Benington

bly. James II died in 1898 in Tottenham. His successor James III continued in the business doing further work at Buckingham Palace. Including bridges, rocks along a garden path and edges to a bank by the lake. James IV was brought into the business by his father and the partnership flourished successfully including a meeting by James IV with King George V and Queen Mary at the Chelsea Flower show in 1931, until just before World War I after this due to a shortage of money, rising costs and a labour shortage led to a decline in business that lasted until 1939 when the company finally went out of business and with the death of James IV in 1957 the Pulham dynasty ended.

Val showed various pictures of the Pulham's work at many places, far too many to mention here, but one story was of the Kew Exhibition Fountain in 1862. This was thought to be lost as it had disappeared but Claude Hitching, author of the book 'Rock Landscapes - The Pulham Legacy', managed to track it down to the lobby of the Bellagio Hotel in Las Vegas. See below



SALHS AGM

During this meeting the AGM for the year 2019-2020 took place. The treasurer had previously submitted the accounts for the year and these were accepted. A brief annual report was read to members by chairman Bob Hunt and the Society officers were re-elected, as were all the other members of the committee who were all willing to stand again.

Terry Collins

Captain Colthurst and the New River

In 1602 a gentleman and his assistant were seen in St Margaret's surveying the line of the proposed New River. The gentleman was Captain Colthurst, who devised the 42 mile route with a gentle gradient to take fresh water to London from the springs at Chadwell and Amwell. He acquired Letters Patent from James I in 1604 which allowed him to "construct a river of water from the springs in Hertfordshire to London". He commenced construction at Chadwell the same year using his own financial resources. The channel was just 6 feet wide and 4 feet deep with near vertical sides. Work progressed well until the spring of 1605 passing through Ware and onto Great Amwell, much of it alongside the highway. At the bottom of Amwell Hill the course of the New River veers away from the road following the base of the valley side to reach the Great Spring at Amwell just below the church. By the time work ceased the channel had been dug to a point just a little beyond the church close to the present location of Great Amwell war memorial. This is as far as the work progressed with Colthurst facing the possibilities of a competing private scheme, another proposal duplicating his own promoted by the City of London and the depletion of his own resources compounded by a lack of other investors.

No more work was done until 1609, the skilled workforce trained specifically for the enterprise by Colthurst being dispersed far and wide. Colthurst himself found employment on another water supply project in Cambridge. Meanwhile Robert Cecil the Secretary of State had asked a very experienced and highly regarded surveyor Israel Amice to appraise Colthurst's scheme, which he found to be "well surveyed and well suited for the purpose". The City of London then set up a committee, which Colthurst was invited to join, for the purpose of obtaining an Act of Parliament to replace Col-

thurst's Letters Patent.

The first of two Acts was obtained in 1606 which among other things increased the size of the permitted channel to 10 feet wide and allowed for the purchase of land rather than rely on way-leaves to cross private land. A further Amendment Act in 1608 enhanced the possibilities of what could be done within the scheme. It was usual for the City of London Merchants to appoint "one of their own" to look after their adventure capital invested in such projects. Thus it was that on the 28th March 1609 it was Hugh Myddleton not Edmund Colthurst who was made the City of London's deputy to construct the New River. Hugh Myddleton had an established excellent record for the careful handling of money and was well respected among those who really mattered in the city. Colthurst had of course lost overall control of his project but Robert Cecil had insisted that in the Act of Parliament provision was to be made for him to be compensated for his early work on the New River. In addition he was recognised by Hugh Myddleton as the man who had proven experience in overseeing the practicalities of the actual construction. No mean feat given the very primitive surveying instruments available at the time. This led to Edmund Colthurst being employed, on a good salary, to oversee the construction of the New River between 1609 and its completion in 1613.

The extension of the New River through the rest of the Parish of Great Amwell and then through St Margaret's took place in 1609. In addition a record exists which describes how in 1613 the channel from Chadwell to Amwell was widened to 10 feet at a cost of £15. Also the sides of the channel were made to slope to avoid the bank collapses that the original vertical sides had suffered from since built 8 years previously. Colthurst was credited at the opening ceremony of the New River with being the driving force behind the construction of the channel. He received, free of charge, two of the original Adventurer's shares in the New River Company and continued to be paid a salary until his death in 1616

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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

February	12th	2021	Timber Framed Buildings in Essex and Herts By Helen Gibson
March	12th	2021	Hertfordshire Through Time by Stephen Poulter
April	9th	2021	An Historic Pub Crawl from Turnford to Hoddesdon by David Dent
May	14th	2021	T.B.A
June	11th	2021	St Albans Signal Box A Brief History by Tony Furse

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