



S.A.L.H.S

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Stanstead Abbotts Local History Society

The Coming of the Railways

Issue 5

Editor—Terry Collins

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Early Victorian Britain was, in the words of our January speaker David Dent, in the grip of railway mania. Between 1830 and 1860, more than 6000 miles of track were laid, including the branch line to Hertford. As the Northern and Eastern Railway Company had no London Terminus they had to join with another company, the Eastern Counties Railway, in order to use the terminal at Shoreditch. The line reached Broxbourne in 1840, opening on 15th September.

The Hertford section began its life as an attempt by Northern and Eastern Railway to block a rivals proposed line from London to Cambridge, via Ware. It took an Act of Parliament which gained Royal Assent on the 21st June 1841 before work could start. Hertford station opened on 31st October 1843 with the first train leaving Shoreditch at 8.00am reaching Hertford, a distance of 26 miles in just over an hour. In January 1844 the company had been taken over

by the Eastern Counties Railway. At the time the standard gauge for railways was 4ft 8 1/2 inches, but the Hertford branch was built with a 5ft gauge, requiring the tracks to be changed during September 1844 to link with the rest of the network.

At this time there was no proper training for drivers, and the engines had no brakes. The brakes were operated by a separate brakeman who set in an elevated seat in the coach behind the engine and was linked to the driver by a length of cord which he pulled to inform the driver when he was going to brake. This was the forerunner of today's communication cord.

The railways were not always completely safe, as on the Hertford line in 1868 a goods train carrying coal was involved in a fatal accident when one of the trucks broke loose, left the rails and hit a signal box, destroying it and killing the signaller who was found beneath the truck's load of coal having suffocated.

Originally there was no

station at Rye House when in 1845, Mr. Henry Teale purchased the Kings Arms Hotel, now the Rye House Tavern. When local and visiting fishermen used the hotel, Mr. Teale was allowed to sell them tickets and they stopped the trains by flagging them down with a lantern. Mr. Teale, being a very astute businessman then bought the Rye House gatehouse and surrounding land and opened the Rye House pleasure ground. In the Eastern Railway guide of 1865 Rye House was described as the greatest tourist attraction of the area, and on Whitsun of that year there were 15000

on nine specially chartered trains, in addition 7,000 more visitors arrived by horse drawn coach.

Between Rye House and St Margaret's there was a branch line into the brick works which operated there. Horses were used to pull the railway trucks from the railway spur. The 100 acre estate now stands where the brickfields used to operate. The original St Margaret's station used to stand on the Rye House side of the road until the present station was built in 1864. Passengers used to change here to a separate platform for the Buntingford line until it closed in 1964.

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St Margaret's Station with Buntingford Line on the right

The Coming of the Railways

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Originally the line towards Ware from St Margaret's was single track until the second line was added later. Twice this part of the line has been flooded, firstly at Amwell Marshes in 1905 and secondly during 1947. On arriving at Ware station passengers would have seen the goods yard at Ware very busy, due to the local Malting industry and other local companies. Some of whom in fact had their own sidings at stations along the line and in some of these horses were still being used to pull goods wagons until 1959. The railway network was in its prime in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras up to 1914 and the outbreak of war. At the wars end the railway went into gradual decline until the advent of another war when they became invaluable.



Saint Margarets staff 1919

After the Second World War it went into something of a decline again until they were nationalized by the Labour government. At the end of his talk Mr. Dent answered a number of questions from an attentive and enthusiastic audience, and was warmly thanked by SALHS Chairman Ian White.

Notes from the Past Part 1

Those of you who attended the December meeting will remember that I spoke about a notebook/diary that had come into our possession, but at the time we did not know who the writer was. We have now confirmed that the author was William Clift. William's notebook covers the years from 1899-1929 and we have now discovered a second small volume covering part of the same period, but some of which is in a different hand, possibly his wife's as it contains recipes, etc.

William Clift was born in Bengoe about 1856 and died in the village aged 88 in 1943. He and his wife and daughters are buried in St James churchyard. His parents were William Clift (1822-1892) and Louisa Taylor (1821-1927). He lived with them together with 3 sisters and a brother in Bengoe until he married Jane Elizabeth Smith in 1879. They then moved to 75 Chapel Lane where William and Jane lived with her parents, and William worked locally as a painter/coachman.

By the time of the next census in 1891 they had moved to 72 Chapel Lane where they now had their own children, Walter, Annie, Edith and Helen. William was now working as a carpenter for Mr J H Buxton on the Easneye estate, where he remained for the rest of his working life. They moved house yet again for in 1901, although still in Chapel Lane, they were now living at number 80, and they had another son, Arthur Thomas. Annie by this time was working as a dressmaker.

By 1911 they had left Chapel Lane and the family home was now in Roydon Road and all the family were working.

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St Margarets Station with the Buntingford line on the left. Date Unknown

Forthcoming Events

- Friday April 19th The Meridian 7.30 pm Parish Hall
- Friday May 17th AGM and "The Ware Mutiny" 7.30pm Parish Hall
- July Advance Notice Guided Tour and Talk at Easneye (Members only)

Members Free. Non Members £2 Tea, Coffee and biscuits included

The River Lea and The New River

Our March speaker Mr Paul Gatland took as his topic the River Lea. The story of the River Lea and its usage goes back many hundreds of years. Not much evidence of its earliest periods remain, as most of the buildings, etc were made of wood and very little has survived. There are few books about the river's early history most of them are connected with its industrial archaeology in stone and iron.

Early records from the reign of Henry IV in the 1450's show that boats were being used on the river from then through the 1500's and the following century until the year 1766 when things began to change rapidly with the introduction of canalisation.

The story of this early period is one of disputes, violence and litigation as the use of the river as a means of transportation was not the primary objective. During these times the river was divided into the different parts, it was not navigable above Ware, from Ware to Hackney it was, and from Hackney to the Thames it was tidal.

The first dispute was with nature as the river was slow and meandering and its banks were prone to collapse. The second dispute was with the fisheries, who provided fish for the markets in London. The owners of these were entitled to pen areas of the river to keep the fish in. In order to build the pens they had to put in wooden barriers to prevent boats moving through. By 1733 there were 18 of these barriers along the river.

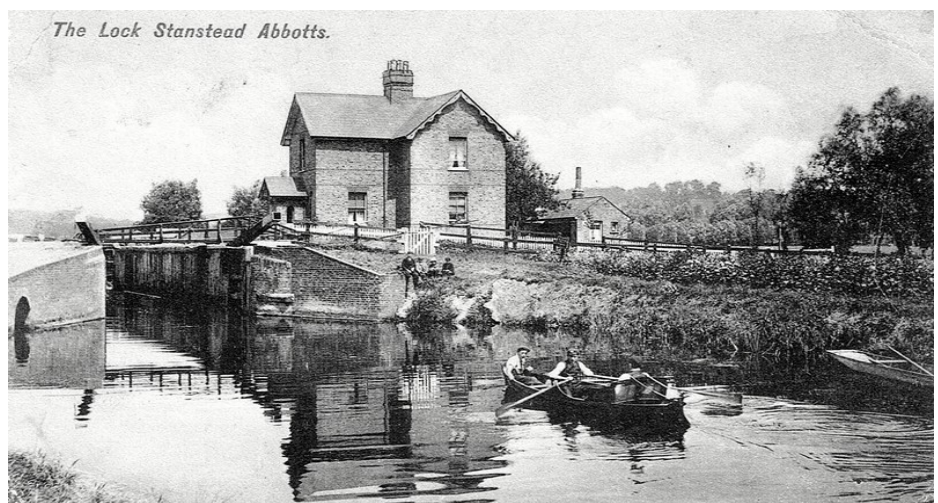
Then there were the mills, and as the river was the source of power to turn the water wheels which powered the mills this led to dams being built to enable mill wheels to operate. A few of these had opening gates to allow boats to pass. On those areas which were too shallow to allow boats through, dams were built with

opening gates and the flash of water pushed the boats along. In 1603 London wanted to take water from the river to provide a clean supply and so The New River was built and opened in 1618 running from Chadwell Springs to Hertford. From this time until about 1730 there were a number of disputes between millers, boat owners and the New River Company about the amount of water that was being taken from the river Lea. The New River Company built dykes across the river but they were destroyed by the other parties involved. Talks were held between the various parties involved in the river's use and an agreement was made whereby the New River Company would agree to an Act of Parliament backed by law. This act defined how much water could be taken from the river and how much they would pay for it. The Act was passed in 1737. The Trustees of the River Lea were set up, consisting of a group of the local gentry which held regular meetings to discuss the usage of the river by boat owners, fishermen, etc. Monies raised was to be used for the improvement of the river by strengthening the banks, dredging and improving towpaths. In 1766 another parliamentary act began the full process of the river's canalisation. The companies were allowed to introduce tolls enabling

cuts to be dug to straighten out the river. The first being from Dicker Mill in Hertford, another in Ware near the priory and yet a third in Stanstead Abbots. The act also gave the trustees the power to buy out local landowners to create further towpaths for horses, before this the boats had been hauled by hand.. In 1849 the cholera epidemic in London created a greater demand for fresh clean water for the city. This gave the New River Company the chance to draw up a plan to create a series of reservoirs built from all the rivers between Hatfield and London, water would then be collected from them, passed to one large reservoir and then pumped into London. Needless to say this plan was never fulfilled. By 1880 The trustees had come into a sizeable amount of money and this allowed them to force an Act of Parliament which permitted them to sell water to the new water companies this in turn financed the final canalisation of the river.

Three locks had been built locally, in the Stanstead Abbots cut, they were Hardmead Lock, Amwell Marsh Lock and Stanstead Lock. After the act was passed the trustees were able to raise £240,000 to build new locks which they did.

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The Lock Stanstead Abbots.

The River Lea and the New River

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Amwell Marsh and lower Stanstead locks were rebuilt in 1858 and again in 1899 when the lock keepers cottage was built. From 1850 onwards the river saw an increase in trade especially in the malting industry taking loads to London. Finally when roads and railways took the bulk of industrial traffic the river began to be used mainly for

leisure purposes which it has continued to do until the present day. Paul's talk was illustrated with a number of maps and old photographs which brought into light some of the topics discussed. At the end of his talk Paul answered a number of questions from the audience and was then thanked by the Chairman for his entertaining evening.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY SALHS

It does not seem possible that it is now almost a year ago that a dozen people met in the Ashlea Room to discuss the possibility of forming a local history group in Stanstead Abbots, but it was, and from that initial gathering, a second meeting was held with 27 people in attendance. From these little acorns the oak that is now SALHS was born. We now have 100 members, and hopefully this will increase still further. We have almost completed the whole of the coming years programme, which now has a regular meeting date, (second Friday of the month) we have begun to arrange outdoor walks and visits. As you can see the newsletter has now doubled in size. Our programme will host a range of topics which we hope you will find

interesting and will be glad to attend. We will be holding one or two social evenings, our quiz in October and Christmas party in December. On May 10th we will be holding our AGM, this is an important date in any groups agenda, so we would ask as many members as possible to attend at 7.30pm. We will hear the annual report from the Chairman and approve the accounts then elect the committee, most of whom are prepared to stand again and finally take questions from the audience. Don't forget only current members may vote. So bring your **new** membership cards. This will be followed by our book launch and then our speaker with the intriguing title "The Ware Mutiny."

The SALHS Committee 2012-2013

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	Terry Collins

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Notes from the Past

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Helen had joined Annie in dress making, Edith (below) was a school-teacher and Arthur was an apprentice carpenter. By now eldest son Walter had left, for he married May Durrant in 1903 at Edmonton and was living at 14 Bowling Road, Ware and was a carpenter in a chemical factory.

Over the next few issues of the newsletter I shall be including excerpts from the books covering family, local, national and international events that William has mentioned in his two books, together with some of the recipes and medicinal potions that are included.

