



'WITHOUT WHOM'

On the front page of the Summer 2012 issue of The Harpenden Society News under the headline 'Recalled to Life' we reported the words of that distinguished figure Ian Fulton on his yielding up of the presidency of The Society. 'There had been a time when I thought The Society might have to close down', he said, 'I am pleased to report that...The Society is revived and flourishing.' Ian Fulton, the salient character in the civic and voluntary life of the town over many decades, spoke perceptively as well as feelingly.

Richard Thomas, the sorrowful news of whose death on 16 May 2015 we briefly recorded in the last issue, was the key player in that resurgence. He had become a member of The Harpenden Society chiefly as a consequence of his being the concerned and very able founder-chairman of the Harpenden Green Belt Association which had been established to campaign against irresponsible housing development. This was but the cutting edge of his strong affection for the town and his determination to serve it, so it was a great boost to the Committee to have the support of one whose civic conscience could scarcely be bettered. However, by the spring of 2011 The Society was in moribund condition and, as Ian Fulton recognised, at a critical, perhaps even terminal point.

It was at that crucial moment that Richard demonstrated that as well as a love of Harpenden he had developed, not least because of the affable benignity of his charming personality, an unsurpassed network of friendships among its inhabitants. This he brought convincingly to bear in persuading various of this wide-ranging acquaintance to, well, 'volunteer' is the perhaps imprecise verb... Committee and allied posts suddenly were being filled by his sometimes surprised protégées. For example, two absolutely fundamental Thomasian appointments were of the chairman, the ebullient and incisive Chris Marsden and the secretary, the quietly authoritative Bob Fletcher. And there were several others who found Richard's allure irresistible.

Richard himself acted as vice-chairman and as co-convenor of both the Education and Leisure and the Health and Social Welfare Working Groups, as well as continuing to be in the van of The Society's crusade to halt the rampant spread of an ill thought-out housing programme. He was, of course, a man who had enjoyed



a busy career and who was heavily involved in church and other significant voluntary activities, all of which are worthy of detailed remembrance. His was an avowedly happy family life and he was a model neighbour. All these fine qualities will be endorsed by those who knew him.

But, from the single viewpoint of The Harpenden Society, it is for his pivotal act of salvage that, after similar awards made in the winter issue of 2014 to those who have made a decisive service to the town on behalf of The Society, we bestow the honour posthumously on Richard 'without whom', quite simply, The Society might have folded completely.

Clichés abound when, sadly, fine men and women die but sometimes a literary citation encapsulates the essence of what one is trying to say. From 1386 Geoffrey Chaucer began – he never finished – The Canterbury Tales and in 'The Prologue' he introduced all the pilgrims to Canterbury who would each tell a tale to ease the journey. This is how he described The Knight, omitting the lines about his actual battles etc. in the translation from Old English by Nevill Goghill. He could have been writing about Richard Thomas.

***There was a Knight, a most distinguished man,
Who from the day he first began
To ride abroad had followed chivalry,
Truth, honour, generous thought and courtesy.
He had done nobly in his sovereign's war
And ridden into battle, no man more,
As well in Christian as in heathen places,
And ever honoured for his noble graces...***

***...He was of sovereign value in all eyes
And, though so much distinguished, he was wise
And in his bearing modest as a maid.
He never yet a boorish thing had said
In all his life to any, come what might;
He was a true, a perfect gentle-knight***

The Harpenden in Question

being a series of editorial commentaries on important Harpenden issues that should challenge thought and encourage inquiry and action.

18. Art for Harpenden's Sake



Harpenden is perhaps not a cultural desert but maybe it is a little like the scrublands with just a few uneasy shoots of vegetation that border on such arid wastes. One thinks here of the creative arts in the widest sense along with other cultural elements and the all-important aspect of heritage. As readers will recall, there has been a recent proposal, We Are...Harpenden, which had aimed at developing a 'virtual hub' to deepen and extend the town's cultural dimensions by seeking new audiences and extending the range both of activities and locations. After much consultation and hard toil, the proposal won through the first stage of obtaining an 'Our Place' government grant for a three year scheme but, in a competition where there were only some twenty fortunate winners out of a field of 120 applications, Harpenden was unlucky.

However, the desire to normalise the cultural and heritage components of the town's being so that it would become the ordinary, the natural experience of everyone, endures. The hope is that the town's several artistic and allied groups will co-operate in heightening the cultural levels in this way.

In order to prioritise what might be required it would be useful to muse over the reasons why Harpenden is lacking in this regard. Although it has several societies devoted to these matters, they tend to exist in their own vacuum and some are scantily supported. There seems to be good provision for children but sometimes one feels this is a kind of life-style extra, not something intrinsic to everyday life. The only venue of note are the public halls, the rebuilding or refurbishment of which has been on The Society's hit-list for years, such is the outdatedness and general unfitness for purpose of the place. The local history society, a lively agency, wryly admits it has been campaigning for a museum in the town for the best part of a century. There is no art gallery, no cinema, no theatre – there is not even one independent book-shop. Most of the reasons given for this inadequacy – the proximity to London and other attractions – fails as soon as one looks at similar commuter towns not a thousand miles away which do

boast theatres, art galleries and museums.

On analysis, it would seem that very often the difference is that the urban history of such other settlements has been of slower, lengthier growth. Harpenden grew astronomically by something like ten times in a hundred years, very fast in historical time. It is as if it never had chance to draw cultural breath in the pell-mell rush to build houses and jump on trains or into cars and rush off to work. Other places had longer phases to build in cultural facilities. Indeed, the absence of any large-scale employment in the town may have been another factor; many towns have benefited from corporate sponsorship in the past; think Black Dyke Mills or Grimethorpe Colliery...

According to the lists of the three general practices in the town, the Harpenden hinterland is inhabited by close on 50,000 people, certainly enough to support a thriving cultural environment were there will and resources.

This Renaissance might be in the modern idiom, more virtual than real, as in the original We Are ...Harpenden proposition. Some towns now have 'living' street museums or heritage trails, with explanatory plaques in guided sequence. Poetry readings, musical ventures and art exhibitions might seek user-friendly venues, places where people naturally foregather, like pubs, supermarkets, the farmers' market, station platforms, all all those bars and cafes. There are examples of this but it really needs concentrated and overall attention. During the We Are...Harpenden consultation there was quite a buzz of interest in 'Sunset Cinema' on the Common and in the concept of the 'Guerilla Playground'

There is no reason why Harpenden, with a little inventive lateral thinking and doughty effort, couldn't become a go-to cultural focus; Hay-on-Wye; Glastonbury – watch out!

Eric Midwinter

Out and About with(and About) The Society

A La Mode with The High Society

The Society maintained its usual presence on the Common for the annual Discovery Day on Saturday 6 June but its representatives were both unusual and uncommon in that they sported our fashionable new regalia of stylised cap and top, as pictured here (Tim Riley -centre and Penny Ayres - right). It certainly enables us to pronounce our existence more emphatically and much interest was shown by members of the public in our activities.



And here are the winners of our Discovery Day draw prizes - all of them local ladies

Mint Velvet Voucher - Ms. Gent
WHSmith Voucher - Ms Grainger
R&M Family Butcher Voucher - Ms. Daniel
R&M Family Butcher Voucher - Ms. Williams
Rollings Wine Tasting Card - Ms. Marke

Commonly Enjoyable

Society committee personnel and members made a strong showing at the really pleasing annual Town Council Common Walk on June 25 – and we wonder how many readers can identify the picture taken by Society member Shelagh Collingwood?



Library Leisure

A 'thank you' garden party was arranged for Tuesday 7 July at the home of The Society's chairman Chris Marsden. This was for the twenty and more volunteers who have for eighteen months kept open the Harpenden Library Express service on Wednesday afternoon and evening – and will continue so to do with great efficiency. After early rain the sun shone admiringly on the guests, including two senior library officials. It made for a relaxed and enjoyable early evening occasion.

Volunteer for Harpenden... and its Society

It's worth having a glance at the Volunteer for Harpenden website which now boasts a score or more organisations seeking those who wish to become involved in worthwhile activity that improves the well-being of the town. www.volunteerforharpenden.org.uk



The Harpenden Society itself is looking for active supporters who might undertake combative roles on its behalf. There are several issues that concern the committee but we lack the personnel to pursue as vigorously as we feel necessary. Thus we are holding a series of brain-storming discussion sessions, hopeful of identifying such activists but please don't hesitate if you feel you could help.

For example, just to pick two instances from the recreational and leisure field, the future development of Rothamsted Park and the needful refurbishment or rebuilding of the public halls are matters which we believe require constant vigilance, in the sense of someone prepared to gather together an alliance of like spirits and interested parties and drive forward plans for reform.

There are other administrative gaps in the ranks. The Society has no vice-chairman and is sadly lacking both a press officer and a fund raising officer at a time when the need to communicate The Society's deeds and boost its never abundant finances is crucial.

Moreover, but importantly, the chairman, Chris Marsden, after what will be five years of gruelling and energetic devotion to civic duty, plans to end his valued stint next year. Would you or, as likely, do you know of someone that you might gently urge to replace him?

Should you be interested or ready to suggest someone, please contact The Society secretary Bob Fletcher at secretary@harpendensociety.org

Memos for Members; Future Events



As part of the exciting St Albans and Harpenden Food and Drink Festival (22 September to 5 October) mark clearly on your calendar Sunday 27 September. As well as the Farmers' Market, there will be a repeat of last years wonderful success from 12.00 noon to 4.00 pm with a fabulous fête of live cookery demonstrations in the Cookery Theatre on Church Green, children's activities and all manner of competitions and events organised by local shops, pubs, bars and cafes. People are still talking about the beach scene, complete with Punch and Judy, proffered by Godfrey's Fish and Chip shop – and that will be repeated to general joy and satisfaction.



Ron Taylor, that enthusiastic leading light of The Harpenden Society is, as usual, playing a major role in ensuring the success of this Festival. It's a good moment to heap praise. One of the problems of a civic society is that we sometimes have difficulty preventing our light from being hidden by that awkward bushel of getting on with things and forgetting – to mix the metaphor – to shout occasionally from the rooftops.

Seniors Annual Fair

So you don't believe us when we say we have a new uniform – see paragraph on Discovery Day on page 3. Then turn up at the Public Halls on Thursday 1 October 10.30 am to 2.0 pm for the annual fair organised by the Harpenden Seniors Forum. We shall again be staffing our stall and telling people about our actions and policies - but this time suitably and definitively clad.

Please send comments on any issue raised in this edition to the editor:

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Visit the Society's website –
www.harpendensociety.org

Updates

The Local Strategic Plan

It becomes ever clearer that of those four words only the first two are accurate. What we are faced with on the planning front is both unstrategic and unplanned. The county, the highways department, the Council for the Protection of Rural England experts all believe the proposed schemes to build lots of houses in the district is partly or wholly unsound. We are told, too, that the planners have held discussions with developers about how the latter might help with contributions to the necessary infrastructure. Few will step back open-mouthed with astonishment that the developers are not keen on that suggestion.

Infrastructure, or rather lack of it, remains the outstanding factor in this messy debate. Our attention has been drawn by critics to an independent review published by the St Albans and District Council in April 2012 that asserted 'there is overwhelming evidence that the current level of urban development in the District is unsustainable.'

How much more frightening that is after three years of continued development and the threat of much more against the increasing fragility of the barely amended facilities and amenities.

Red House Forum

The Red House Forum met on 27 July and was encouraged to hear from David Law and Diane Brent of the Herts NHS Community Trust that the plans to modernise facilities on the Harpenden Memorial Hospital site were being steadily progressed and that all the interested parties are backing the scheme to bring a health and well-being hub to Harpenden. We hope to include a fuller account of this in our next issue.



Designed by Ron Taylor

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printed by Dor2Dor, Harpenden and distributed by
hard-working Society members.

Keeping Watch

Our Community Safety Working Group, led by the sapient Alan Jackson, offers more advice to Harpenden towns-folk.

Theft of car keys and cars

Several recent vehicle thefts were facilitated by the owners leaving the car keys near letterboxes or insecure windows and doors. Never place car keys where they can be seen.

Catalytic converters

There has been a recent increase in the theft of catalytic converters from vehicles in Harpenden, particularly Batford. Large vans and 4x4s are particularly at risk. It's not easy to prevent such thefts so the emphasis is on obtaining evidence (park near CCTV) that can lead to convictions.

Distraction thefts

If you're standing near an ATM you're vulnerable to distraction thieves. Be vigilant. If anybody says you've dropped money on the floor or produces a map and asks for directions totally disregard them (then have a good look at them and make a note of their appearance – it may help somebody else).

Thefts from vehicles

These have recently increased in Harpenden. Park in well lit areas and leave nothing attractive in view (just a jacket? what about the cash, cards and smartphone that might be in the pocket?).

The St Albans and Harpenden Volunteer Police Cadets

The Cadets are a uniformed voluntary youth organisation, supported by Hertfordshire Constabulary. Fourteen to eighteen year olds who may be interested in joining should email steven.alison@herts.pnn.police.uk.

Fraudulent emails

Watch out for fraudulent emails claiming to be sent by Apple iTunes, detailing a recent purchase. The email shows a purchase receipt and states that if you did not make the purchase in question you should click on the link provided to obtain a refund. If you do, you'll be taken to a malicious web page and asked to give your card and personal details. **Call Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040 if you receive such an email.**

An email fraudulently claiming to be from Royal Mail is currently circulating: it contains a virus. The email states that the Royal Mail is holding a parcel or letter for the victim, who is then required to contact Royal Mail to arrange for the item to be resent or collected. This is clearly an approach that looks very plausible, so it would be easy to fall victim. If the instructions are followed the virus encrypts files on the victim's system and requests a ransom be paid in order for the files to be decrypted. If payment is delayed the ransom increases. Nasty one, and perhaps not easy to spot. To protect yourself (this applies to most scams) you need to see if the email is addressed to you or if it is generically addressed; and to look at the quality of the images on the email. Never open attachments to unsolicited emails regardless of who sent them. Don't click on a link to a website: go to the website yourself and log in from there.

Help for victims of crime

Hertfordshire has a Victim Care Centre known as 'Beacon'. It offers support to victims of crime, regardless of whether the crime has been reported to the police. **To access the service visit www.hertfordshirebeacon.org or call 0300 011 5555 from 7am to 10pm daily.**

Please Note: Most police incidents are not crime-related

A mere 22 percent of incidents to which the police respond are crime-related. Most incidents concern such things as damage-only road collisions, natural disasters such as flooding, protests, licensing firearms, missing persons, abandoned vehicles and hoax calls.

AWARDS 2015 ALERT!

Each year The Harpenden Society makes Awards for projects which have been completed during the current calendar year. The Awards Committee is asking Society members and the wider public to be considering nominations now for outstanding building developments in Harpenden completed during 2015. Maybe you already have something in mind; if so email awards@harpendensociety.org

Cafe in the Park

Thanks to Harpenden Town Football Club. Their renovated clubhouse now open for the new football season in Rothamsted Park boasts a cafe which is open to the public :
Monday - Saturday 10-4
and Sunday 10-2
Selling a wide variety of refreshments.
Large play area for children.

The Unveiling of a New Editor

This is the moment faithful readers have been waiting for since 2011; the announcement of a new editor. Eric Midwinter is to step down in March 2015, as announced in the last issue, after producing twenty editions of the Harpenden Society News.

The editor would like to take this opportunity of thanking himself for having the good sense to go while the going is good. The new editor will bat himself in as Assistant Editor for two issues before being proposed and seconded formally at the next AGM in the spring of 2016, always provided Rupert Murdoch does not make a move to expand his media empire.

The personage in question is ALAN BUNTING.



Alan ticks all boxes and a few we did not know had been manufactured. He has been a Harpenden resident for 54 years; a Harpenden Society member for several decades; an ardent Harpenden Green Belt Association member and a LADACAN member. He is the Membership Secretary of Harpenden Local History Society

He has been a working journalist for 52 years, on a freelance basis for 45 of those busy years and he edited for 14 years the Bunting Society, a genealogy-angled biannual journal. He admits to being 'reasonably competent with a camera', a claim which if made by the current editor of the Harpenden Society News would cause guffawing derision among his extended family.

Perhaps he will be best known to you as a regular and ever sensible letter-writer to the Herts Advertiser while sources reveal that he sustains an affectionate if insistent correspondence with the local councillors.

**It's a dream appointment.
Welcome to the journalistic fray, Alan**

Richard Thomas; 'The Bench Fund'

It is proposed to place a bench in memory of Richard in Ambrose Wood, known more familiarly as 'the Little Wood'.

As many of you will know, Shirley and Richard Thomas fought a lengthy battle to secure the public rights of way across and around this pleasing piece of woodland on Ambrose Lane, just across from the top of Bloomfield Road. Furthermore, Richard acted as an unofficial forester, often to be seen clearing the litter, mending broken fences and gates, even reinforcing the path between Ambrose Wood and the vaster woods to the rear of the Oval. It was a spot he found peaceful and restful and no memorial could be more fitting.



Above. The Celtic Forest Monmouth Bench

Should there be a surplus, it would be forwarded to Richard's chosen charity the Prison Fellowship (Bovingdon), yet another arrow in the full quiver of his voluntary endeavours.

Those who would like to contribute to 'the Bench Fund' should forward their cheques, made payable to 'The Harpenden Society' marked 'Bench Fund' on the back of the cheque, to Harry Downie, 66 Eastmoor Park, Harpenden AL5 1BW. For those wishing to use online banking, The Harpenden Society bank account number is 28772946 and the sort code 60-10-07.