

SOPWELL

RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

making Sopwell a better place

Sopwell Project

Website: The Sopwell Memories Project has been a great success. Following on from the website launch last August, a lot of interest has been generated and we continue to have lots of visitors to the site (www.sopwellmemories.org.uk) – well over 20,000 now! I am still researching and adding photos and items so keep watching and learning all about your area. The Sopwell Project Facebook page is very popular and fans regularly contribute information.

Book: Although we are in profit - and have over £2000 in the book fund to spend on community projects - we need to sell more copies of our book *Sopwell: a history and collection of memories*, as we have lots left cluttering up my house! So we have decided to hire the charity market stall in St Albans on **Saturday 15th August** to continue to promote the Sopwell Memories website and hopefully sell lots of copies of the book. They will be sold at a reduced price so a bargain! We will need volunteers to help on the day as it will be a long one. Leave a message on the website or contact me on 865061 if you can spare an hour or two. Fingers crossed the weather will be kind to us.

Leaflets: The Sopwell history walk leaflets have been very popular. We are distributing them via the Tourist Information Centre. We plan to print more when we run out.

Sandy Norman

Annual General Meeting 14th May

Our AGM this year will take place on Thursday 14th May starting at 7.30pm and the venue will be Mandeville School, Mandeville Drive. Come along, meet the team and hear all about what's going on locally. We have a fantastic guest speaker - Dr Julie Moore Deputy Director of the Heritage Hub at The University of Hertfordshire - who will be speaking about everyday lives in the First World War. This is your association. Are you happy with what we have been doing? Do you want to help? Come along and get involved. Like vampires we need fresh blood to survive!



From Your Editor

Welcome to our 27th edition of the Sopwell Newsletter. We have a somewhat unashamed history bias to our newsletter this Spring; including walks, anniversaries, lives from the past and not to mention a very eminent historian, Dr Julie Moore, as our guest speaker, for our AGM. I hope there is something for everyone in this edition and may you all have a very enjoyable Spring and Summer.

Dates for your diaries

Spring History Walk 12th April 2pm
See page 3 for details.
SRA/CMS Historical,
Environmental, Archaeological Walk,
10th May, 2pm.
See page 3 for details.
AGM 14th May at 7.30,
Mandeville School

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The Balancing Pond in Griffiths Way

Many passers by walking along the footpath from Sainsbury's service gates towards the level crossing may have wondered at the steel fencing on the south side carrying several, now dilapidated, signs warning of deep water. The wording is somewhat "over the top" as deep water in the hole would mean that the outlet tube was blocked and Thames Water would be liable for lack of maintenance.

Throughout most of its life the depth of water will remain more or less stable at 50mm which supports water-tolerant plants growing in the layer of sediment spread over the concrete slab base.



view towards the footpath fence

The hole is in fact a huge water tank designed to be empty but available to receive the water from a once-in-30 years deluge of torrential rain such as that experienced in parts of southern England at the beginning of 2014.

It was a requirement laid down by the Environment Agency when the Gas works were demolished and the area designated by the Planners as business/commercial use. As such it was anticipated that most of the 5 hectares of land would be covered with impervious materials, such as the roofs, car parks, roadways, footpaths and service yards and this would create a rapid run-off necessitating sufficient well maintained drains to ensure that no flooding would occur within the various ground level premises.

A Story from Our Past

You may be aware of the work being carried out by the First World War group on what was happening on the home front in St Albans during 1914 – 1918. <http://www.stalbanshistory.org/category.aspx?id=175> The aim of the group is to produce a book of their findings and the production date is set for next July 2016. The group are all members of SAHAAS (St Albans and Hertfordshire Architectural and Archaeological Society) or the 'Arc and Arc' for short. As a member of this group I have done various amounts of research on different topics but I would like to share with you some research I did on the road where I live. I live in one of the Victorian Terraced houses in Riverside Road. At the time of the First World

The Balancing Pond continued

Thus the main drain run is oversized to cope and in fact the pipe into the tank has a diameter of 2 metres. However the outlet leading to the River Ver is only 675mm to ensure that the



massive flow into the tank would be kept under control and the rest of the water build up for a relatively short period but never becoming deeper than about 2.5 metres which could

be deemed "deep water".

It must be appreciated that the same torrential rains falling on the rest of St Albans would also be flowing into the River Ver so there could be some back up between the outfall point and the actual Pond outlet. Flooding of the marshy land downstream of Sopwell Mill would be quite acceptable as a natural means of water control.



Jack Hill

A Story from Our Past continued

War, this road was called Longmire Road, named after the building company who purchased the land and constructed the houses.

The houses were built in 1899 and originally were designed as workers cottages and all rented. The lives of the occupants, from the records we have, appear to have been hard, especially in the early years. By the 1911 census, the tenants had a variety of occupations from brush makers and labourers to a hound-hand and a kennel man. The numbers living in these houses, shock us today. In my own house in 1911, there was a family of ten, plus another husband and wife. Twelve people in all. My wife and I find the space limiting and there's only two of us!

From the Absent Voters list we find that there were 36 men from Longmire still serving during the spring and summer of 1918. If we add a further five men who died during the war and three who appealed against being called up and failed, we have at least 44 men from this road who served King and Country and this from a road of only 42 houses. Is this an exceptional ratio or have other streets in Sopwell a similar tale? You may be inspired

A Story from Our Past continued from page 2

to research your own street and we would love to hear your stories. Don't forget Sopwell Memories is live and eager to accept your contributions. www.sopwellmemories.org.uk Also, if any of your research or memories cover the First World War period, the F.W.W group would very much appreciate your findings. Contact them at: email: homefront@stalbanhistory.org

On a final and sombre note, Longmire Road suffered more than one tragedy during the war. The Catlin family lost three of their four sons to the war. Frederick Dorling, who was widowed before the outbreak of war and left with seven children, married his next door neighbour, Nora, also a widow, with two children, in 1914. He was exempt from combatant duties but he served as a private in the Hertfordshire Royal Army Medical Corps in a voluntary capacity. The tragic events start literally just a week or so before the end of the war. Frederick died from influenza a few days after assisting to receive a convoy of wounded men at Napsbury Hospital and within a few more days after his death his daughter also died. Although there were representatives from the RAMC and floral tributes sent by his employers Messrs E. Lee and Sons Ltd and the Red Cross, Frederick and his daughter were buried together in a communal grave with six other people, with no headstone or marker to commemorate their final resting place. Furthermore, this left Frederick's poor wife, Nora, widowed now for the fourth time. There is more to this family's tragic story but that will be for another time.

Barry Bateman (Editor)

Spring History Walk Sunday 12th April 2015 starting at 2pm

Those of you who love our history walks will be delighted to hear that we have organised a walk for this spring. It is a repeat of the First World War walk which our walk leader, Councillor Eileen Harris organised last autumn which was poorly attended because of a lack of adequate publicity. The walk will start at the Watercress Beds in Riverside Road. Eileen will be taking us to see some of the lesser known street memorials, telling us more about the servicemen who lost their lives and finding out about how the war affected life in St Albans. The walk is free. All are welcome.

SRA/CMS History/environmental/archaeological walk Sunday 10th May

We have been discussing with Countryside Management Services to organise another walk for you in the spring. This one will start in the Nunnery open space at 2pm (meet by the seats) and you will learn about the history of the surrounding area as well as the flora and fauna and what's buried below! Further details will be publicised on the noticeboards and on the website.

Bat Walk

The bat walk last August was really successful and we had to turn many of you away. Hopefully, we will be repeating it again this year maybe with a different focus. We are not sure of the date yet as we are having difficulty contacting the "batman". Watch out for the posters advertising the event and of course our website.

Lighting up the Nunnery?

I had a very interesting letter from one of our Sopwell Residents in which the question was posed, why do we not floodlight the Nunnery Ruins, as it is one of the most iconic features in our environment? Could we not use solar power to light up the ruin? What are your thoughts? Please email us or comment on our web page on: info@sopwell.org.uk or www.sopwell.org.uk

Foodbank

The St Albans and District Foodbank provides food for people that find themselves in crisis and is part of the Trussell Trust's network of foodbanks. They operate four foodbanks with in the area and their newest one opened in January 2015 here in the Sopwell District. Open on a Wednesday between 12.30 and 2.30, located in the Christadelphian Church Hall, Abbots Avenue. Within its first ten months of operation, the foodbank has fed over 750 people, more than half of those with children. This works out to be over 7,000 meals supplied so far. This vital help for our most needy neighbours has been made possible by food and funds provided by local people, plus the time and commitment of dedicated volunteers. The foodbank relies entirely on donations of food, from pasta to puddings, in - date non - perishable items such as: tinned meat products, fish, vegetables; coffee, tea, sugar, cereals and treat items. Donations of non-food items are also very welcome such as: cleaning products, toiletries, nappies and toilet rolls. Donations can be dropped at the session on a Wednesday or left in the porch of St Bartholomew's Church on Vesta Avenue.

The St Albans and District Foodbank has been extremely fortunate as The Rothamsted Research Centre in Harpenden have provided office and warehouse space free of charge to them, keeping the operating costs minimal. If you are interested in volunteering at the foodbank, would like to use the foodbank or would just like to find out more about them, please email staadfoodbank@yahoo.co.uk or call 07787 867703.

Situations Vacant

Your association is run by a dedicated group of volunteers. Volunteers come and go so we need to keep asking for help otherwise we will fold. If you feel you can give a little time to help us, please email info@sopwell.org.uk

Allotments

It's not too late to get an allotment in time to grow your own fruit & veg this year. There are a few spaces at Sopwell Mill allotments.

Contact Phil Bruce-Green, at St Albans Council on 01727 819329 or email: greenspaces@stalbans.gov.uk

STOP PRESS!!

During routine maintenance work on our willow tunnel, it was discovered that it had been vandalised and our willow expert had a very difficult job in repairing it. However, despite the vandals attempts to destroy the tunnel, your SRA has thwarted their efforts. Please see our website for further details: www.sopwell.org.uk

Railway Celebrations

The 150th anniversary of the opening of the railway line from St Albans to Hatfield happens this year. The first stretch of the line (now Alban Way) goes through Sopwell – from the start near Leyland Avenue to the old London Road station. We have been in touch with the Smallford Residents Association and Fleetville Diaries about some sort of celebration to mark the occasion. The actual date is Friday 16th October 2015 so the whole weekend 16-18th October could be an opportunity for celebration. Some suggestions currently being discussed are:

An exhibition of the Smallford Station Project

A walk and picnic – people could do the whole St Albans stretch or join at different points along the line – bit like getting on and off the train

Dressing up in Victorian/Edwardian clothing – e.g. station master or even just a passenger

Guides stationed at the various stops along the way with interesting historical facts and figures

The North London Society of Model Engineers (they're based in Colney Heath) setting up a short railway ride alongside Smallford Station.

If anyone has any other suggestions let us know. And if anyone wants to get involved please contact us. It should be really good fun so keep that weekend free in your diaries. Updates about the event(s) will be posted on our website www.sopwell.org.uk and in the next newsletter.

Please support the Community Café!

The community café at St Julian's is open every Thursday from 10am until 3pm for teas, coffees and homemade cake and from 11am – 2pm for light lunches. For lunch you can choose between a bowl of lovely homemade soup and a roll, a baked potato with a choice of toppings, a bacon bap or a toasted sandwich. The food and drinks are very reasonably priced. All profits made are passed on to the community. Last November, on the café's second anniversary, £1800 was split between four worthwhile causes.

It is a real Internet café in a very friendly atmosphere. Wi-Fi connected computers are onsite and available for use free of charge while you are there. Why not come along to see?

Next Edition

The next edition will be out next Autumn. If you have any items for inclusion or you wish to advertise, please go to the website and leave a message. Advertisement charges: £50 for half a page and £25 for a quarter page.

If you live in Sopwell, you are automatically a member of SRA. There is no charge to join and events are free.

You could look up the latest on the Sopwell Memories website for example while enjoying a cup of tea and a slice of homemade cake! Or, if you are a novice, there is usually someone there to help. Give it a try one Thursday.

Sandy Norman

Useful Contacts

Councillor Eileen Harris: 831611:

eileenharris555@btinternet.com

Councillor Iain Grant: 811286:

cllr.i.grant@stalbans.gov.uk

Councillor Janet Smith: 763907:

cllr.j.smith@stalbans.gov.uk

County Councillor Sandy Walkington: 07802 177317

sandywalkington@btinternet.com

Litter fly-tipping, graffiti: 0845 1258000 or

a.cleanerdistrict@stalbans.gov.uk

Faulty road or pavement surface: 01438 737320 or

www.hertsdirect.org/highwayfaults

Sopwell Residents Association:

info@sopwell.org.uk & www.sopwell.org.uk