



News and events

- **St Albans Museum + Gallery** opened on Friday 8 June. Open from 10.00 to 5.00 on weekdays and 12.00 to 5.00 on Saturdays. www.stalbansmuseums.org.uk
- **Next meeting:** 7.30 Wednesday 18 July. Simon West, District Archaeologist, will give a talk: *The Archaeology of Wheathampstead – a Quarter Century of Highlights*.
- **Devil's Dyke Walk** Sunday 1 July. Meet at 11.00 am at East Lane Car Park. Details are on the 'Events' page of our website.
- Professor James Clark's talk about **Abbot John of Wheathampstead** at St Albans Abbey has been postponed from 28 June to 12 July. Go to www.stalbanscathedral.org.uk and click on 'Learning' 'Study Centre' and 'Talks'.

Notes and queries

Fire! Fire!

Wheathampstead farmers in the 1880s had a great deal of trouble with incendiaries setting fire to their barley and wheat stacks.

In September 1882 a stack of winter oats (the produce of six acres) was set alight at Wheathampsteadbury Farm, the property of Mrs Lattimore. Thomas Fayne, William Chiffens and George Brown, strangers to the neighbourhood, were tried for the crime. A witness had seen them drinking at The Walnut Tree in Bury Green from 8 o'clock and heard them saying "We are going away on Wednesday, and we'll do something before we go". He followed them up Brewhouse Hill towards the Elephant and Castle after closing time and the fire was seen about twenty minutes later. A broken fence opposite the maltings was evidence of access to the rick yards. Tuesday 8th January 1884 saw more rick fires, this time at Place Farm, another Lattimore property.

On the following Sunday, the rector Canon Davys preached a fiery sermon: "*Fire is kindled to burn the people's bread*".



"What he does do is to injure the poor, the labouring class, to which he himself may happen to belong, for every corn stack consumed means the destruction of so much bread, and the consequent increase in the price of the poor man's loaf. It also means the loss of so much labour. You cannot thrash out a stack that is burnt

to the ground, so the hands that would have thrashed it lose their labour and its reward and at this season of the year when labour is hard to get, this ... is no small matter."

Lord Kilcoursie of Wheathampstead House (9th Earl Cavan) was captain of the fire brigade at that date. The brigade did a good job on this occasion, preventing the fire doing "such extensive damage as had been feared". A few days later Kilcoursie, at his own expense, entertained 59 men (the brigade and helpers) to a substantial supper at the Bell Inn, provided by host Mr McCulloch. Lord Kilcoursie made a speech reminding all present that the real loss after such a fire fell upon the insurance company.



His letter appealing for funds to repair the engine was published in the parish magazine a month later. "During the last 15 years", he wrote, "several hundreds of pounds worth of property has been saved from the flames". Additional hoses and fire hooks were required to give the best chance of success in the event of another fire breaking out in the neighbourhood. The sum of £30 was needed. The fire engine was at this time kept in the church porch, a secure and central village location.



Fire engine in 1907

Ruth Jeavons