



Wheathampstead History Society

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News and events

- **Royalty and Aristocracy in Hertfordshire** is the theme of the Hertfordshire Association for Local History autumn symposium to be held in the Memorial Hall on **Saturday 24 October**. Details of this all-day event will be sent out later in September.
- Our **next meeting** will be on **Wednesday 21 October** when **Jon Mein** will present on **Hat-making in St Albans 1800-1940**.

St Peter's Church

Until 1908, church services at Gustard Wood were held at the school that had been built in 1875 but changes in the school's requirements meant that this was no longer convenient. This headline in the Wheathampstead Parish Magazine in December of that year is the first record we have of St Peter's Church.

A Mission Room at Gustard Wood Proposed Site.

The article that follows, written by Owen Davys in his capacity as Lord of the Rectory Manor, states that a suitable site for a Mission Room had been found within the Manor. The plan was to build a "room of corrugated iron, on brick foundations, 40 ft. long by 20 ft. wide, with internal fittings and floor of wood ... calculated to hold 150 persons ... for meetings, classes and other needed purposes ... at least £200 will be required, of which £50 is offered already. Will you help to raise the remainder?"

To help with the fund-raising, Olivia Upton Robins of Delaport wrote to Laura Pearce, widow of the Reverend William Pearce, late rector of Ayot St Lawrence, asking if she would give £5. Mrs Pearce replied "For an iron church, I will give you nothing but make it a permanent church and I will give you £1000." (more than £100,000 today).

No time was wasted. The land was conveyed from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners to the St Albans Diocese on 24 November 1909, the church was built, and the dedication ceremony, attended by "an overflowing congregation" was held in 1910.

A folder of correspondence recently donated to the History Society takes up the story in the 1970s. The correspondent, Rodney Locks, moved to Gustard Wood in 1965 and was a deeply committed member of the congregation. The first letter, dated 18 March 1976 and written "On behalf of the Council of Elders of St Peter's Church", asks the Herts County Treasurer for guidance on the procedure for applying for a grant to erect "a much-needed hall for community

purposes". There follows scores of letters dated from 1976 to 1981 and sent to many organisations and agencies, together with architects' drawings.

From the start, St Albans District Council said that there would have to be a car park. After investigating other possibilities, it was proposed that the hall and the car park should be built on land belonging to the Mid Herts Golf Club. They agreed to give it to the Church.

This plan was pursued but on 29 June 1978 a lorry and a car collided in the road outside the church where 16 cars were parked. This prompted the Elders to prioritise the car park and shelve the plans for a hall.



Despite some objections, the planning application for a car park was approved by SADC in February 1979. Because it was common land, the Secretary of State for the Environment also had to give permission, which he did in December 1979. The Parochial Church Council approved the acquisition of the land in February 1980. A fund-raising campaign raised the £6,000 needed for the groundworks and volunteers did the unskilled work. The new car park was opened by Councillor Bob Sparrow on 28 June 1981.

At more than three cms. thick, with correspondence with St Albans District Council, Herts County Council, Wheathampstead Parish Council, the Parochial Church Council, the Bishop of St Albans, the Diocesan Board of Finance, two firms of solicitors, architects, the Department of the Environment, the Colne Valley Water Company, builders and contractors, the folder is testament to Rodney Locks' commitment to the church.

