



HARPENDEN & DISTRICT
LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER 140
APRIL 2020



Front cover illustration:

View across the Common from Park View House, Milton Road, in the
1890s, by Kate Richardson

LHS archive, cat.no. B 3.99

NEWSLETTER 140

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DEADLINE

**Please note that the deadline for publication in Newsletter 141 is
15 July 2020**

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District Local History Society unless noted otherwise.

EXHIBITIONS AT PARK HALL

Are held on the first Saturday of March, June, September and December.

Exhibitions are open from 2:30pm until 4:30pm. Members and visitors are welcome; refreshments are available and there is a bookstall for the sale of the Society's publications. Please check the Society's website for updates.

The History Centre in Park Hall is also open when there is an exhibition and you are welcome to look at the archives and resources we have, or to contact us for an appointment at another time.

JUNE 2020

Please note that there will be no Exhibition at Park Hall on 6 June 2020. The Society had intended to be present at the HARPENDEN CARNIVAL on 13 June 2020 but this has also been cancelled

The next exhibition will be held, circumstances permitting, on Saturday, 5 September 2020.

The theme is yet to be announced; please let the Society know if there is a theme that you would like us to mount. Assistance with the exhibition is also welcome.

Volunteers to help in stewarding the exhibitions are also welcomed; refreshments gratis!

The theme of the exhibition held on 7 December 2019 was 'Parkview; Harpenden's first estate'

Milton, Shakespeare, Spenser and Cowper Roads were the first to be developed when building land became available in the 1880s. Many interesting people have lived or set up their businesses here and despite redevelopment the area retains character.

The Society would still like to hear from anyone living in this area with information about their house and its previous inhabitants.

Please contact Rosemary Ross: gavros.ross@btopenworld.com

The theme of the Exhibition on 7 March 2020 was 'Old Maps and Plans of Harpenden'

This exhibition attracted map-lovers to look at a small selection of maps in our collection. The collection includes copies of Ordnance Survey maps from 1879, 1898, 1924 and a series of large scale local maps from the 1965 and 1975 series.

In addition we displayed samples of the information which can be derived from the 1843 Tithe award map, reproductions of older maps of Hertfordshire, and maps of Harpenden Urban District Council's proposals to develop every parcel of land in the 1950s - to meet the acute housing shortage after WWII.

We also displayed some architects' drawings, including those of Flowton Priory, just after it had been moved from Suffolk and re-erected on West Common in the 1930s.

Anyone interested in consulting our map collection should contact us to arrange an appointment to visit the Local History Centre in Park Hall, Leyton Road.

SOCIETY MEETINGS IN 2020

Meetings are held on the fourth Tuesday of the month, all commencing at 8:00pm unless otherwise noted.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 virus pandemic the Society has announced that its meetings up to and including June 23rd have been cancelled.

We hope to rebook speakers for the 2021 season.

We will make decisions concerning the future meetings and exhibitions noted below in due course, please check the programme on the Society's website and posters or contact the Committee for any changes.

Change of venue:

Due to unforeseen circumstances, the remaining meetings in 2020 were to have been held at 'Bennet's', Royal British Legion in Leyton Road. Unfortunately there is no dedicated parking at Bennet's - but parking in the Amenbury Lane car park is free in the evenings.

The meetings for the remainder of the year noted below may also be subject to cancellation.

September 22nd Nursing: Florence Nightingale and Mary Seacole
Colin Oakes

October 27th On and Off the Footplate
Bill Davies

November 24th Short contributions by members and refreshments

Visitors are welcome; please encourage any non-members that you know to come along - all we ask from them is a donation of £3 towards the cost of the evening

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2020

The AGM due to have been held on 28 April 2020 will be rescheduled, if possible before 22 November in accordance with Charity law.

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

Hitchin Historical Society	Newsletter 54	January 2020
SAHAAS <i>(St Albans & Hertfordshire Architectural & Archaeological Society – alias the ‘Arch & Arch’)</i>	Newsletter 215	February 2020
The Hitchin Journal <i>A Hitchin Historical Society publication</i>	Vol. 30 No 1	February 2020
Local History News <i>The Magazine of the British Association for Local History</i>	Issue 134	Winter 2019
The Local Historian <i>The Journal of the British Association for Local History</i>	Vol. 50.1	January 2020
Pinner Local History Society	Newsletter 141	Spring 2020

HARPENDEN HISTORY WALKS

2020 is Hertfordshire Year of Culture, with local communities planning their own events. Harpenden Town Council approached the Society at the end of January with an invitation for us to lead Harpenden History Walks on Sunday, 23 February – a Farmers' Market Day.

All four sessions were advertised by the Town Council and were fully booked, however storm Jorge blew up, and so numbers were greatly reduced. David Keen and Rosemary Ross led alternate groups, starting near the Cross Keys, and taking a short route along the High Street to the start of the Common.

We had brochures of photos of the Cock Pond, Lines Forge, the old Norman Church, Batchelors' Row, Anscombes (with Rapid Wire cash system) and views with the Brewery tower and other features, to show that Harpenden DOES have History. Those who attended were enthusiastic and gave generously to a collection for the Museum Fund. Rosemary Ross

MANAGING HARPENDEN COMMON

A report by Joyce Bunting on the talk given to the Society by Karen Poore at the meeting held on 22nd October 2019.

In her capacity as Commons and Greens Officer for Harpenden Town Council, Karen Poore is responsible for managing 86.6 hectares of open space. Harpenden Common dates back to the 13th Century. Historically, commons were sited on poor quality land where animals were grazed, woods coppiced for fuel and building, and other materials such as heather, gorse and bracken were gathered. Harpenden Common now has a diverse mosaic of habitats for local wildlife.

Shaping plant life on the Common

The Hayfield is a wildflower meadow, cut once a year on 31st July. This prevents coarse plants, thick grasses and nettles from proliferating and provides a habitat especially for butterflies, bees and other insects. One year no bees were found on the Hayfield after the cut. As a result, *Natural England* advised that strips of grassland be left unmown to provide late flowers. The

result was an increase in bee sightings and the Common won an award for environmental improvement from ‘Bees Needs’.

Clumps of gorse and bushes known as *roundels* dot the open Common. They are coppiced in rotation to prevent them encroaching on the grassland. Along the edge of the main road, *buffer strips* of scrub and plants absorb pollution from traffic. These and the roundels provide shelter for wildlife.

Wild heather can be found here and there on the Common, but it grows old and woody if not tended. New patches have been seeded, using heather cut from No Mans Land Common at Wheathampstead. These plots are fenced off to keep rabbits and muntjac from browsing. It is hoped that when eventually established the patches will join up to make a lovely swathe of colour.

St John’s Wood is a young wood which regenerated naturally when animal grazing ceased. The Commons Management is tailoring the site by removing holly undergrowth and thinning out trees to allow oaks and other trees room to spread their branches and roots properly. Bridleways through the wood are kept open, leaving sunlight traps where plants and fungi flourish. Birds use these rides as thoroughfares, catching insects and roosting in the edges of the wood.

At the Brickle Dells, clay was at one time dug for bricks leaving chalk soil. A small patch of chalkland grass found there has been fenced to keep bikes off. In two years’ time it should grow rare chalk species. Seed heads of green winged orchids have

been brought from Langley Meadow, in the hope they will grow on our Common.

Surveys and engagement with the Common

Karen runs 'Project days' during the autumn and winter, when volunteers help to prune and tidy the Common. Pupils from St Georges School and students working towards The Duke of Edinburgh's Award take part as well as many local citizens. Lunch is provided for volunteers. Parts of the Common are surveyed every month by volunteers. Over five years, 23 species of butterfly and 4 species of bat have been registered and several plants listed as 'county rarities' are monitored.

Social activities

Presently, the Common is home to a football club, two cricket clubs and a golf club. Throughout the year events such as fairs, circuses, classic car meetings and art exhibitions are held on the Common. A permissive horse ride loops the Common. Karen must ensure that no lasting damage is done to wildlife and plants. Harpenden Common Nature Trail is approximately one mile long with a series of information boards at strategic stops, describing the history and wildlife of the common. The Council co-operates with Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust to get school children out in the country and engaging with nature. 'Wellbeing walks' around the Common are beneficial to mental health, and inform the public of the work of the Commons Management team.

Protection

England's commons are protected by the Secretary of State, to whom application must be made for any changes.

2019 marks the 13th year in a row that Harpenden Common has earned a Green Flag Award, and the third consecutive year that Lydekker Park has been recognised. The Green Flag Awards Scheme is run by the environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy.

Joyce Bunting

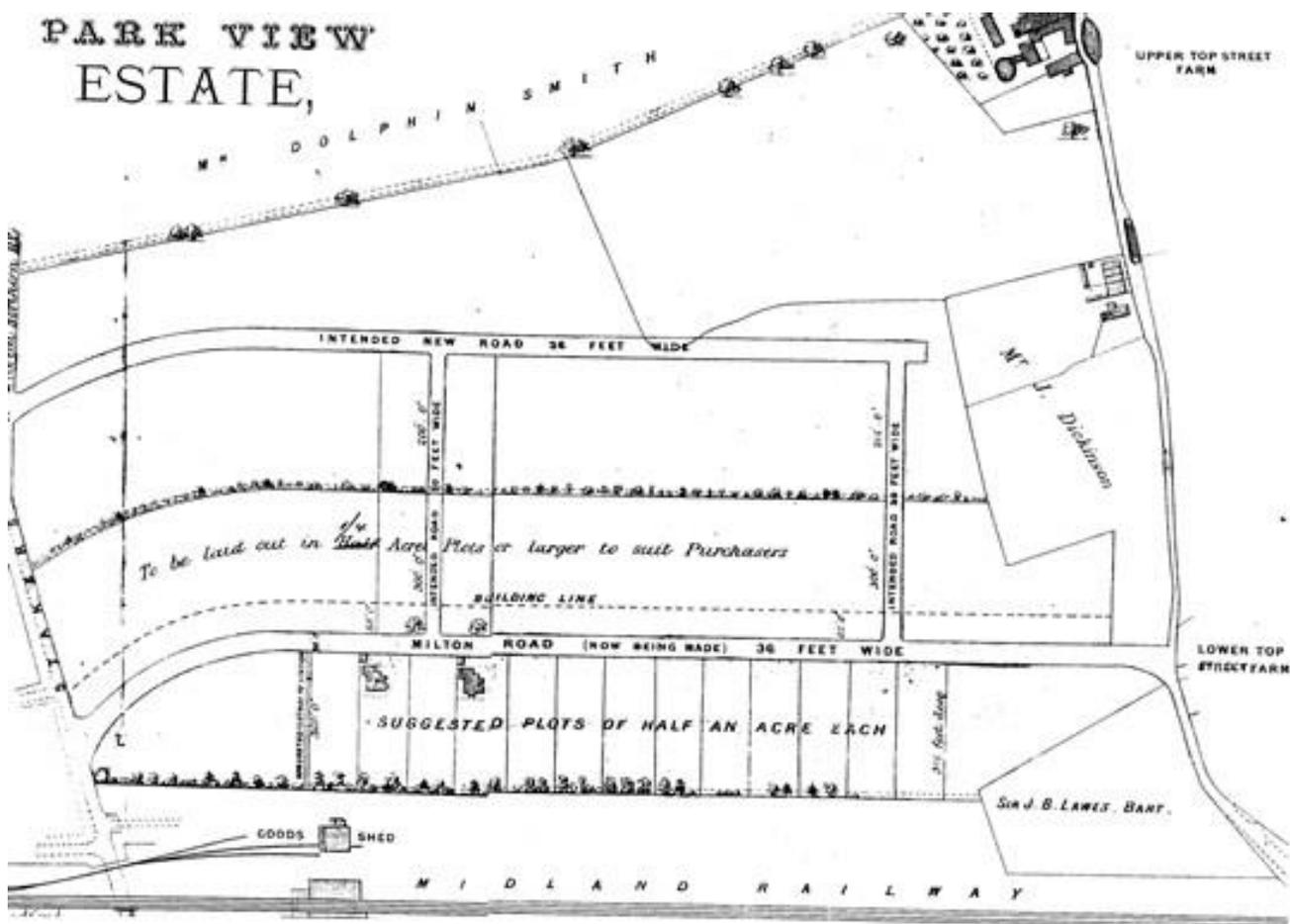
NOTES BY DEREK MORRIS on the talk he gave to the Society as a contribution to the Members' meeting held on 26 November 2019.

Derek Morris brought us up to date with his latest research, and reminded us that he had been a member of a team that since 2003 has been indexing the Sun Fire Office policies. The current on-line index on the web site of the London Metropolitan Archives covers 1781 to 1842, contains nearly a million names, together with addresses and occupations, from all over the country and is now the most used archive at the LMA. The

**Park View Estate:
21 Milton Road**

Its best known resident was the Comte de Voilement, the alias of Count Esterhazy, the villain of the 1902 Dreyfus Affair. In 1949 it was the home of Miss Muriel Herring, piano teacher.

Gavin Ross, 2011



Proposed layout of plots on the west side of Milton Road, 1884
LHS archives, BF 10B/3



Harpenden Common: The Southdown Ponds



St Nicholas Church before renovation in the 1860's. No significant external changes had been made since 1705 (see page 21)

Herts Archives

indexing is working back to 1810 and forward to 1862, so always useful to check on new up-dates every two or three months. To your search term just add the word 'insured'.

Derek's book *Whitechapel, 1600-1800* stimulated interest in this under-researched parish and led to a major three-year project by the Survey of London, now part of the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, London. Google "Survey of London Whitechapel" and you will find a good example of an interactive digital map that links the Survey's research on individual buildings to the history of the people who lived in them based on written submissions and oral history.

Following his book *London's Sailortown, 1600-1800: Shadwell and Ratcliff, a social history*, (East London History Society, 2014), Derek has been looking at the early years of the massive dock-building that took place down river from the Tower of London between 1800 and 1826. He discovered at the Museum of London Docklands the original reports by the surveyors of the London Dock Company on the property they had to purchase in Wapping and Shadwell to enable the docks to be built. Each report was faced by the owner's description of the same property, and rarely do the two reports agree on the quality and value of the property!

Finally, Derek has discovered at the National Archives at Kew the 18 volumes of correspondence of the Commissioners of Compensation covering 1799-1812. The role of the Commissioners was to assess the "losses" that London merchants claimed to have made because of the opening of the West India, London and East India Docks, which moved trade away from the

Pool of London. It was discovered that Sir John Soane, a famous architect, and partners were employed to assess properties between Chelsea and Northfleet on both sides of the Thames: an aspect of his work that had been missed by his many biographers.

The Commissioners received 1,376 claims: a few were withdrawn, others were duplicated, many were dismissed and some twenty or so were disputed and went before a jury to assess the claim.

Of the twelve great livery companies only the Mercers (1) and Drapers (3) resisted the temptation to submit demands for compensation. The others all submitted claims for losses as "tackleporters": the losses ranging from the £4,186 claimed by the Ironmongers' to the £32,220 claimed by the Merchant Taylors. All these claims were "dismissed" by the Commissioners.

Again, major differences were found between the "losses" claimed and the awards made. William Mashiter, a wealthy wharfinger, on behalf of the proprietors of the Iron Gate Wharf, claimed "losses" of £98,277 16s 0d and was awarded £18,000. This was one of the largest claims, and demonstrates the importance to London's merchants of this stack of warehouses just down river from the Tower.

Claims were also received from lightermen, ticket porters, carriers and carmen, and together throw new light on the men working around the Port of London between 1790 and 1812.

Derek has written up all this research and can provide copies of his papers, which are listed at www.singsurf.org/stepney

PETER TOMKINS – AN OBITUARY

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Peter Tomkins on Friday 27th March. Pete spent most of his working life at Rothamsted, supporting what was Rothamsted's important and well-respected research on bees. John Stevenson worked closely with Pete when undertaking his ground-breaking research on the effects of pesticides on bees, and remembers him as a man highly respected in bee-keeping circles, with wide ranging interests in the politics and history of bee-keeping. Pete strongly supported John's work on investigating and facilitating the safe use of agrochemicals with honey bees.

Pete's notes on his talk to the Society on 'Rothamsted, the Bee and Me' are available in our Newsletter 139 (December 2019) and at:

http://www.harpenden-history.org.uk/page/rothamsted_the_bee_and_me

RONALD FISHER, A LEADING HARPENDEN SCIENTIST.

Notes by Gavin Ross on the talk he gave to the Society as a contribution to the members' meeting held on 26 November 2019.

2019 marked the centenary of the appointment of Ronald Fisher to apply statistical methods to the accumulated crop yields and

weather records of the Rothamsted Long-Term experiments.

Ronald Aylmer Fisher was born in Hampstead in 1892, and during his student years at Cambridge he became interested in the fashionable eugenics movement, encouraging gifted parents to have larger families. He saw the need to reconcile Darwin's theory of evolution with Mendel's genetic discoveries, and the importance of statistical methods and mathematics in resolving these issues.



Ronald Fisher, mending his mousetraps, Rothamsted
from R A Fisher: The Life of a Scientist, by Joan Fisher Box (Wiley, 1978)

In 1914 Fisher volunteered for the army but was rejected due to poor eyesight. Employed as a teacher he was able to pursue his research, and published some important early papers, leading to his being recommended to apply for the Rothamsted post. Rothamsted had no suitable calculators for a statistician, and Fisher was recommended the Millionaire, a large heavy

mechanical device, which Fisher's daughter, Joan Fisher Box, describes as 'sounding like a threshing machine'. The cost was greater than Fisher's salary, but the Director agreed, and this machine was used for many years, and loved by his successor, Frank Yates.

The variety of work at Rothamsted provided the stimulus for a thorough re-examination of the role of statistics in the applied sciences. Fisher proposed new principles for the design of experiments, partly inspired by the improvements needed to the existing long-term experiments at Rothamsted. The need to distinguish between real differences in the effects of treatments, and apparent differences due to natural variability and chance effects led to the establishment of basic principles of making inferences from data. Studies of crop variation and weather records led to advances in methods of fitting models to data. Data from insecticide trials, plant diseases and soil properties led to general methods for different types of data.

Fisher and his wife Eileen Guinness lived first in Markyate, but his ambitions for a large family led to the purchase of Milton Lodge (now redeveloped as Stakers Court). With ten bedrooms and a large garden, it suited him for his experiments in genetics, with cages full of mice, chickens and rabbits. But his income was quite insufficient to provide for a large family, and meals were at first cooked on a Primus stove, and few rooms adequately heated. With two boys and six girls, his daughter Joan described the chaotic nature of the household, quite out of keeping with the respectable neighbourhood.

His first major publications met some resistance, while to him

the ideas were obvious, and needed no further explanation, and in later years he became editor of the *Annals of Eugenics*, which he used for rapid publication of his latest findings. His genetic studies culminated in 1931 with the publication of his revolutionary book, *The Genetic Theory of Natural Selection*, which finally established the validity of Darwin's theories.

By 1933 he felt that he had done enough at Rothamsted, and moved to University College London, leaving the department in the capable hands of Frank Yates and his team. But he continued to live in Harpenden, collaborating with Yates and others. He was involved with important discussions with leading geneticists such as Haldane and Julian Huxley. When war broke out and the Galton Laboratory at University College was bombed, the department was accommodated at Rothamsted.

In 1943 he applied for a professorship in Cambridge. His marriage had broken down, and they agreed to separate, with the family staying behind at Milton Lodge. Their eldest son, George, was killed in the war. When Eileen died the younger son, Harry, owned the property until it was redeveloped.

Fisher continued his productive career, receiving many awards and honorary doctorates, and was knighted in 1952. He obtained some notoriety, as a heavy smoker, by questioning the link between smoking and lung cancer. On retirement from Cambridge he moved to Adelaide, where he died in 1962. He is buried in Adelaide Cathedral, and his archives are kept in Adelaide and in Cambridge, with a memorial window in the dining hall of Caius college.

2019 was celebrated as the centenary of his appointment, with an international conference at Rothamsted in July. Many local people remember the family, and their role in local life. He was one of Harpenden's greatest residents.

Gavin Ross

WEBSITE UPGRADE

We will shortly be upgrading our 10-year old website www.harpenden-history.org.uk. Would you like to join the editorial team for the new site? If so, please contact Rosemary Ross on (01582) 715399, or at: gavros.ross@btopenworld.com

THE ASSAULT UPON HARPENDEN CHURCH, 1705

An item with an intriguing title was printed in a weekly political called *The Rehearsal*, for the week from Saturday May 12th to Saturday May 19th, 1705:

Item 2. A defence of the Reverend Mr. Lamb from the foul mouth of the Observer. With the assault upon the church of Harpenden.

Before considering the contents of the article a few words of explanation:

The parliamentary election of 1705 for the second parliament of Queen Ann's reign was characterised by deep divisions between

the Tory and Whig parties concerning the protestant succession and the perceived threat in many Tory minds to the supremacy of the Church of England by ‘dissenters’.

At this date many official posts were closed to those who did not take communion in the Church of England. A practice had grown up by which ‘occasional communion’ - taking such communion once a year - allowed persons of tender conscience to hold such offices. These included both those within the Church of England (nonconformists) who disagreed with the form of the communion service and those (dissenters) who refused to recognise the supremacy of the established church.

In 1704 some Tory MPs introduced a bill, misleadingly called the ‘Occasional Communion’ bill, in Parliament in order to ban this practice. As it could not pass by itself, the MPs tried to pass it by physically attaching it to a money supply bill that would pass, a procedure called ‘tacking’. These MPs and all who supported the bill became known as *Tackers* and their action became an issue during the election of 1705. Passions raised by the tacking issue contributed to the general disorder and riots in some constituencies that characterised this election.

In the spring of 1705 the *Observer* a periodical published by John Tutchin, an ardent whig, made an accusation against ‘*a certain parson of Hertfordshire*’. The implication here is that no member of the clergy would utter such inappropriate language unless drunk:

The diligence of the inferior clergy in this election is notorious, not one in ten of 'em but what is for the Tackers. A certain parson in Hertfordshire not long since, being in the company of very credible witnesses, and speaking of the Tackers, out of his passionate zeal for High Church said, 'the devil take me, if it be not a greater sin to poll against the Tackers than to murder my own father.'

Enter *The Rehearsal*, which was founded in 1704 by Charles Leslie as an ongoing rebuttal to the *Observer*. Leslie did this by means of a dialogue between two persons: 'Observer', whom Leslie uses to set up the *Observer's* material - often distorted - for rebuttal by 'Countryman' (Leslie).

Leslie picks up on the *Observer's* story, identifies the parson in question and adds the story of a company of drunken whigs and dissenters breaking into the parish church of St Nicholas at Harpenden, the only church premises in Harpenden at that date.

Item 2.

Observer:

But what say'st thou to what I tell of your fine parson Lamb, in my Observer, N 9. The last but one to that before nam'd? Don't I make him a pure drunken fellow, and set down a violent expression of his in favour of the tackers?

Countryman:

I believe it, like the rest of thy stories! That is, I believe not one word of it; and thou brings no vouchers. And I have this further reason to believe that Mr. Lamb is not a man of that violent and passionate temper thou woud'st represent him. Thy violent crew gave him a trial of it, about a month past, at

Harpenden near St Albans; where a company of whigs and dissenters being met to concert elections; and as they use, to rout and revel; Mr Lamb lock'd up the church-doors, to secure that place, at least, from their insults. For which, as it happen'd, he had good reason; for, in their cups, they had a mind to have the church-bells to ring, to grace their solemnity; and, finding the church-doors lock'd, they made no ceremony with it, but broke into the church and fell a ringing the bells.

Upon which Mr Lamb went to them, and represented their disorder to them in so mild a manner, that he persuaded them to depart in peace, and leave him in possession of his church. But, upon second thoughts, and t'other cup, they got up again, and finding the church-doors lock'd up again, they, as before, broke in the second time, and fell to the bells. Mr Lamb went to them again; and his rhetorick had that persuasion, as to get them out quietly the second time, and he lock'd up the church doors again. But, to make my story short, they broke in the third time. And Mr Lamb seeing no end of it, took with him the church-wardens and constables, and, reasoning the case with them, saw there a violent dissenter of his parish, to whom he address'd himself, and said, neighbour, I'm sorry never to see you at CHURCH but upon such an occasion as this, to do violence to it. The dissenter as pertly reply'd, That the church was as much his as the parson's, and that he wou'd come to it, when he wou'd, and how he wou'd, and do what he pleas'd, with other insulting language. But the authority of the church-wardens and constables, and fear of the law, repriev'd the church, and sav'd Mr Lamb, for that time; who, in all this assault upon himself and the church, carry'd with the greatest evenness and moderation, of which all present were witnesses, And therefore the Observer's contrary representation of Mr Lamb, without other voucher than his own veracity, will go down with none but who are in love with slander, and take every occasion against the church.

In 1705 Harpenden had its own 'parish' church (St Nicholas) but was not a separate parish, being a chapelry of Wheathampstead.

The Rector of Wheathampstead had the power to appoint a curate or vicar at Harpenden. At this time the Rector of Wheathampstead from 1673 until his death was John Lambe (1649-1708) and the vicar at Harpenden was one Charles Lambe, who was probably related to the Rector.

The '*Parson Lamb*' in question was almost certainly Charles Lambe. The cost of any repairs that could serve to corroborate the story would have appeared in the Harpenden Churchwardens' accounts for 1705 but they have not survived.

Dear reader: do you think that 'countryman's' tale has the 'ring' of truth about it, or do you believe that Parson Lambe made the statement attributed to him by the *Observer*?

John Wassell

Told by court whigs, or country whigs and tories
of most elections there are different stories
corrupt or clear we see each party made
as Grub Street writer is inclined or paid.

Contemporary verse

