



NEWSLETTER

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WWI - 100 YEARS ON – REMEMBERING A BRAVE HERO

Christopher Augustus Cox was born Christmas Day 1889 in Kings Langley, in 1912 he married Maud Swan with whom he eventually had eight children. Christopher enlisted into the army amongst the many who answered Kitchener's "Call to Arms", in September 1914, becoming a Private and Stretcher Bearer in the 7th Battalion, Bedfordshire Regiment.



He landed in France in July 1915, a year later Chris was wounded in the leg on the infamous opening day of the Battle of the Somme whilst his battalion stormed, captured and held not only the first two German trench lines but also their final objective, the Pommiers Redoubt. Private Cox was back with the battalion in time for the storming of Thiepval and the Schwaben Redoubt in September 1916 and served through the winter of 1916-17.

He came through the assault on the Miraumont trench system in February 1917 unscathed, during the Ancre operations and won his Victoria Cross in March 1917 when his battalion was one of those who pursued the Germans as they fell back onto the formidable Hindenburg Line defences near Achiet-le-Grand.

Second Lieutenant Sydney Ronald Chapman was in a shell hole in the front line and witnessed Private Cox going to work; "I saw him wandering about in front of Hill 130 in the front wave attending to the wounded. He showed absolute

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contempt for the volume of machine gun fire and heavy bombardment, although machine guns opened on single targets. I previously saw him carry back a man on his back on three different occasions, and on withdrawing my Company I found he had similarly treated six others”.

On his return journeys having dropped the wounded men off at the regimental aid post, Christopher also ferried machine gun and other supplies to the front line troops.

Christopher Cox was recommended for the Victoria Cross and his official citation was published in 'The London Gazette' on the 11th May 1917.

“Private Christopher Augustus Cox No. 13908. For most conspicuous bravery and continuous devotion to duty when acting as a stretcher-bearer. During the attack of his Battalion the front wave was checked by the severity of enemy artillery and machine gun fire and the whole line had to take cover in shell holes to avoid annihilation. Private Cox, utterly regardless of personal safety went out over fire swept ground and single handedly rescued four men. Having collected the wounded of his own battalion, he then assisted to bring in the wounded of the adjoining battalion. On the two subsequent days he carried out similar rescue work with the same disregard to his own personal safety. He has on all occasions displayed the same high example of unselfishness and valour.”

Six weeks later the 18th Division assaulted German positions around Cherisy during the Battle of Arras. Advancing only to find the wire uncut, the front waves had to dig in and shelter from the crossfire and artillery barrage that rained down on them. During the advance Private Cox was wounded twice in the foot and was helped off the battlefield by one of his mates. After an operation to remove the bullets he was invalided back to 'Blighty'.

On 21st July 1917 the King presented Christopher Cox with the Victoria Cross at Buckingham Palace. In an interview he simply said **“I was only doing what any British soldier would have done”**. Following his award, he was offered a Commission and a house but refused both, saying he would not accept a penny for his fallen comrades.

After the war he returned to Kings Langley and worked for a few years for a builder, then worked for another 32 years as a Maintenance Labourer at the Ovaltine Factory.

During WWII he served in the Home Guard and again showed his courage by entering the bombed-out Griffin pub to search for the publican in the ruins. Unfortunately Ted Carter was already dead, the only civilian killed in Kings Langley during the war.

In 1954, at work he slipped on the roof of the factory, he fell through a skylight and landed two floors below. It was several hours before he was found immobile and in pain. The accident marked a decline in his health and he spent most of the rest of his life in hospital. Christopher Cox, V.C. died 28th April 1959 aged 69, the father of eight children.

Edited from The Bedfordshire Regiment in the Great War website

Image: Christopher and Maud on returning to Kings Langley after the V.C. presentation ceremony (note his three 'wound stripes' on the lower left cuff of his uniform), from The David Spain Collection, cared for by Dacorum Heritage Trust.

THE END OF AN ERA

Peter Percy Menswear shop in Marlowes recently closed. Manager Justin Hamper (son of Peter) told the Gazette that sadly the workload had become too much for him and he had decided not to renew the lease on the building, which ended on 15th March.



Justin told the Gazette: “It’s not down to the cost of the business, but the hours I need to do are not viable or realistic. We had been trying to sell the business without much luck, so that left us where we are with things now. It’s unfortunate, but we’re not prepared to commit to a lengthy time on the lease, so sadly it was also inevitable”.

Peter Percy Men’s Wear opened on 1st December 1960, when Peter Percy Hamper, the proprietor and skilled cutter, employed two tailors, and two people known as “kippers”, one was a machinist, the other a buttonhole and felling hand.

A client could order their suit on a Saturday and if the cloth was chosen from a shelf stock (a little longer if the cloth had to be ordered from a mill), a fitting would be

arranged for Wednesday, and the garment was ready for collection the following Saturday.

We found Peter Percy's original advertisement, which appeared at the bottom of the front page of the 2nd December 1960 edition of the Gazette. The 'Opening Offer' for a free shirt worth 37s 6d was quite an expensive shirt at that time.

This well-known tailors was regarded as Hemel Hempstead's 'original designer store', Peter cut made-to-measure suits



and did fittings and adjustments within the store premises.

With changing times came uncertainty and the need for the business to adapt. When 'ready to wear' garments started to become more mainstream it threatened the vitality and viability of

many independent clothes retailers. Peter was once told by another store manager that he'd be 'out of business in six months'. Thankfully the demand for the store's skilled craftsmen and women didn't waiver, and they could even call on the support of residents from neighbouring counties such as Bedfordshire and even North London.

It's nice to think that for over more than half a century, many local grooms and their attendants have been suited by the experts at Peter Percy. Thousands of suits have been made since the shop opened; it is a shame to see a local independent business close. Now that history has come to an end, and it must have been an emotional last few weeks for Justin and his colleagues at the store. We wish them all well for their future, and thank them for years of service.

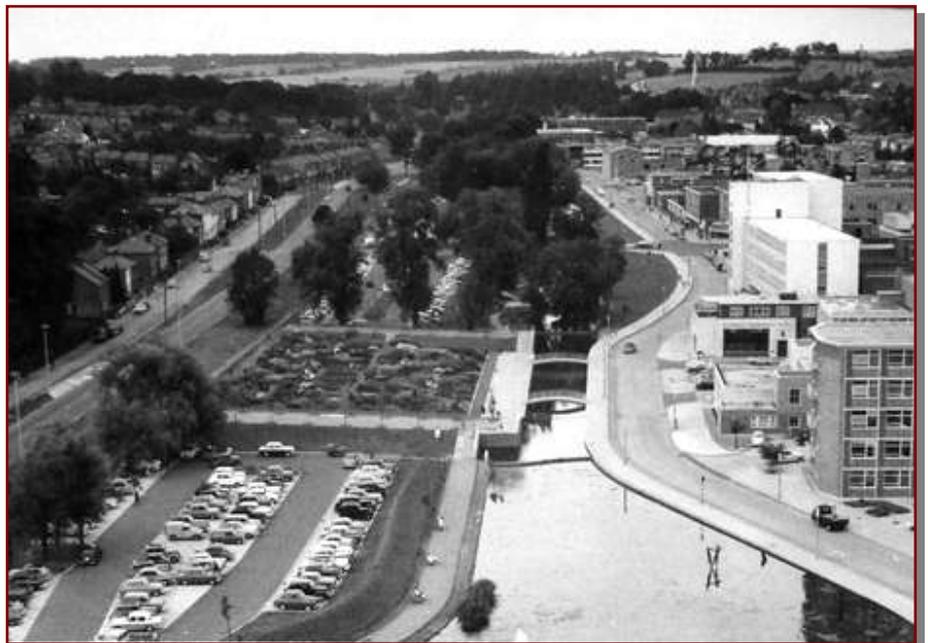
Images: Previous page – taken on the last day of trading 15th March 2017. Left – Gazette image from the business' 50th anniversary in 2011, L to R Jeannette Goodway, Ivor Simmonds, Justin Hamper and Peter Percy Hamper outside the shop. Right - Gazette 'opening offer' advertisement in the Gazette dated 2nd December 1960.

70TH ANNIVERSARY OF HEMEL'S NEW TOWN

It was the platinum anniversary of Hemel Hempstead being declared a New Town on 4th February 1947. The small country town was earmarked for expansion, coming to the rescue of Londoners living in overcrowded slum housing and those displaced by WWII bombing.

Geoffrey Jellicoe drew up the plan for Hemel Hempstead, aiming to create 'not a city in a garden, but a city in a park'. The new town centre was planned around the water gardens, created by the River Gade. The administrative centre of the town was designed by the firm of Clifford Culpin and Partners, featuring the town hall, magistrates court, library and a health centre.

Neighbourhood centres were designed with housing clustered around shops,



medical facilities and churches. The first to be built was Adeyfield designed by H K Ablett, with Judith Ledebor designing Bennetts End, and the firm of Fuller, Hall & Foulsham doing the same at Grove Hill.

Cllr. Andrew Williams, Leader of the Council, reflects: "Hemel Hempstead's 70th New Town anniversary coincides with the start of a new chapter in our history. We're just completing our Hemel Evolution regeneration of Hemel Hempstead, which has transformed the town centre and taken it to the finals of the Great British High Street Awards 2016". A newly designated Enterprise Zone, Maylands will continue to provide major employment opportunities for our residents as they have since the first factory was built there in 1950".

Over the next four decades Hemel Hempstead continued to grow, developing eight new neighbourhoods. According to the national census, Hemel's population grew from just over 20,000 in 1951 to over 55,000 in 1961. At the last census in 2011 the population was 94,932, but is now estimated to be over 100,000.

Cllr. Williams continues: "Looking back over our New Town heritage shows us just how far we've come. The Forum opened just a few weeks ago. I'm confident that Hemel Hempstead is in the best possible position to welcome in the next 70 years, allowing the communities of Dacorum to thrive and prosper".

Photos: Waterhouse Street and the Water Gardens dated early 1960s courtesy of Talking New Towns Project.

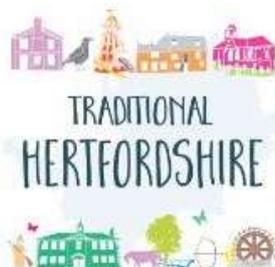
CURATOR'S CORNER

Traditional Canal Art Workshop with Sign Writer Hannah Matthews – Friday 7th April

This exciting event is part of our HLF funded Traditional Dacorum project celebrating the history or rural life, legends and superstitions in the Borough. Come and learn more about the history of the canals in Dacorum:

View and handle genuine historic objects and get inspired to create your own beautiful canal art!

The workshop will take place at Berkhamsted Arts & Crafts shop at 29-31 Lower Kings Road on Friday 7th April from 1.30 – 3.30 pm. Places are £5 per person (including materials and refreshments). Don't miss out, book your places now at www.bacshop.co.uk/classes



LOTTERY FUNDED

Traditional Dacorum Pop-up Exhibition. Our forthcoming HLF funded project pop-up exhibition will take place in the vacant shop, which used to be Mothercare in the Marlowes Shopping Centre in Hemel Hempstead. The exhibition will open to the public on Saturday 27th May and run every day for two weeks – come along and see our artefacts and stories related to some of the interesting local legends and superstitions.

Take a look at the pages on our website, we would still like to hear your stories, to become part of our exciting new project see: <http://www.dacorumheritage.org.uk/dht-news/legends-and-superstitions-of-dacorum/> We are still looking for information on ghost stories and May Queens <http://www.dacorumheritage.org.uk/dht-news/have-you-ever-been-crowned-may-queen/> this is a great opportunity to be part of our next exhibition.

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