



NEWSLETTER

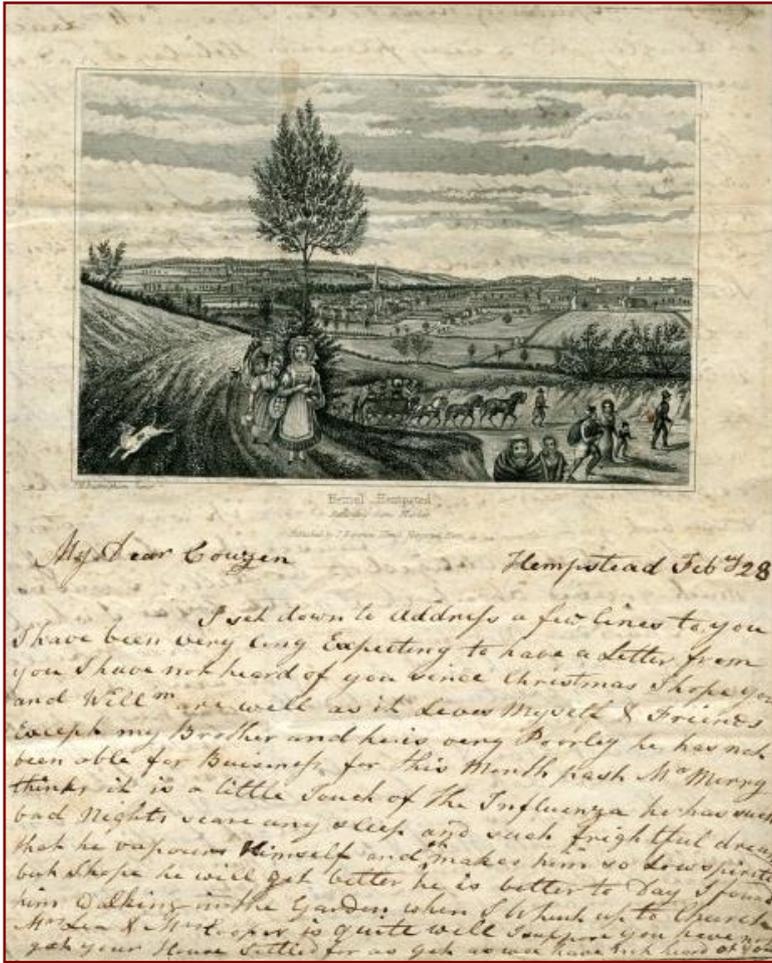
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VICTORIAN PENNY POST

Early in 2014, a rare handwritten letter dating from 1841 came up for sale on an online auction. We purchased the letter after successfully securing funding from Hertfordshire Heritage Fund and the Friends of Dacorum Museum.



Elizabeth Lea wrote this letter to her cousin in London on 28th February, it was delivered the next day, on 1st March. It includes a penny black stamp (1d.), from the original issue runs. The 'Penny Post' was the world's first adhesive postage stamp, which went into circulation in May 1840. The stamp is in good condition with four margins and may have been printed on John Dickinson's paper.

The letterhead engraving is entitled 'Returning from the Market' by John Henry Buckingham, depicting figures on foot and in carts. It shows market goers climbing the long hill out of Hemel Hempstead towards St. Albans. Buckingham's viewpoint remains little changed today. Compare the image taken last spring from Adeyfield Road looking across Keen Fields and the allotments above The Midland Hotel, towards the Old Town.

John Buckingham was a prolific local artist, and is best known for his watercolours and satirical cartoons of St. Albans, its people and politicians. Whilst his technique may have been considered poor by Victorian standards, his humour and interest in everyday life made him one of the most interesting of provincial artists. Buckingham later altered this print, removing the tree, part of the bank, and the two figures awkwardly sinking out of view in the foreground. A copy resides in St. Albans Museum.

Within the letter Elizabeth writes about many areas of interest, here are a few.

"the pulpit is hung with black for Sir Astley Cooper and his pew lined with Black". Referring to the eminent Sergeant Surgeon to the Royal household, who established in 1827, the infirmary for the poor at Piccotts End. Sir Astley Paston Cooper of Gadebridge House, died on 12th February and the church had been prepared for mourning.

"Newman's have got the post office given them about a fortnight since they have been long expecting to have it they will remove soon up in the town to a larger house nearly opposite Mrs Slades". News of the first post office in Hemel Hempstead.

"I have been spending nine or ten days at Mrs Leach's at Langley and a very pleasant holiday I had. We were out a great deal and had company at Home so all enjoyed ourselves very much, she is a nice woman". 'Holidaying' in Kings Langley, an interesting social history reference.

Research discovered Elizabeth's father John Lea's will dated 1792, also in Hemel Hempstead. According to the 1841

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Census, Elizabeth lived in Marlowes and states she was 'born in county'. Her brother George was a grocer in the High Street and lived in Old Marlowes House, a Grade II* listed house at the corner of Marlowes and Midland Road.

This letter is a wonderful addition to the DHT collection. Private correspondence from this period are rare, and this fascinating letter helps to fill an obvious social history gap in our collection.

Nina Glencross & Mark Stephens

Photo: Above courtesy of Mark Stephens taken Spring 2014.

EXCAVATIONS AT ASHRIDGE BUSINESS COLLEGE

As the result of a grant from the Berkhamsted Arts Trust in 2009, the Berkhamsted & District Archaeological Society was able to purchase a resistivity meter. Following training, the instrument was used to investigate the route of a Roman road postulated by Viatores to pass through Little Gaddesden; it

was found that it did not in fact exist. Spurred on by this result the society members were eager to find other uses for their new machine.

An opportunity arose in 2010 with an invitation to undertake work at Ashridge Management College. The house was designed by James Wyatt and built for the 7th Earl of Bridgewater. Humphrey Repton prepared designs for the laying out of the gardens. We know that his designs were not followed in their entirety, and Mick Thompson, Head Gardener and Archivist at the Management College, was in the process of writing a conservation plan for the gardens. The Society was asked to help in finding out if any of the features of Repton's design still existed within the gardens.

After agreeing a project design with the College, and acceptance of the proposals by Hertfordshire County Council and English Heritage, members of the archaeological society undertook a geographical and a resistivity survey of as much of the grassed area at the rear of the College that was accessible and practicable. Surveys were carried out during June and July 2010 and a report showing the results was presented to the college management. As resistivity can show geology

as well as archaeology, it was agreed that a very small area, away from the immediate vicinity of the house, would be opened up in order to confirm that the results set out in the initial report showed the remains of buildings. This excavation was carried out in September 2010, and showed a significant brick wall along the eastern edge of the house. Further work the following year showed that the wall extended along at least two sides of the house. Research undertaken during the winter months confirmed that the wall was built in the Tudor period. At the dissolution of the monasteries, the monastic buildings of the Bonhommes were not demolished but turned into a home for the children of Henry VIII. A wall was constructed around the monastery at that time. Each year since 2010 the society has excavated further areas and it has shown that most of Humphrey Repton's garden design has not survived. The gardens have been landscaped with a levelled grassed area to appear uniformly flat. This has helped in finding the archaeology, as there is only 10 cms of top soil and turf above the flint walls.

Due to practical limitations of both time and personnel we have only opened a relatively small area of the lawn, but we have found a large number of artefacts, including coins and medieval encaustic tiles, which are identifiable and many can be dated. Reports were prepared at the end of each season's excavations setting out our findings for the College Management, and the site supervisors have given a presentation to staff members to keep them informed and interested. Following excavations and further research in documentary sources, we now have a better understanding of the possible layout of the monastic buildings and the relative importance of the original College of the Bonhommes. Copies of each season's reports are available on the society's website www.berkhamstedarchaeology.co.uk and have been lodged with DHT.

Photos: Courtesy of Berkhamsted & District Archaeological Society.



'HERTSHIRE' MEN DURING THE GREAT WAR

Early in 1915 troops at the front endured the winter rain and cold, often soaked through with little or no rations from one day to the next and an escalation in conflict with the enemy. The letters home that appeared in the local press, reflected the worsening environment and the increase in deaths and casualties.

13th March 1915. Tending the wounded.

Some exceedingly interesting letters have been received from Lance Corporal W. H. S. Woods, son of Mr. and Mrs. W. Woods, of the High-street, Hemel Hempstead, who is serving in France with the R.A.M.C. Lance Corporal Woods was very well-known in the town as the secretary of the Fire Brigade, and also a very active worker in connection with the Marlowes Baptist Sunday School, of which he was the secretary. Writing to his friends he describes his work thus:-

"I have been assisting in the operating theatre for some time past, but now am in charge of the surgical ward, that is the ward where all serious cases are cared for. It is by no means an easy task, for the poor fellows require heaps of attention, coming in wet through, and in many cases covered in their own blood from their wounds, yet it gives plenty of scope for good, practical work, and I find it exceedingly pleasing to attend to the poor fellows in their pitiable condition. There are, of course, times when one wishes one could leave it all behind, to see the terrible suffering, and often the passing away of these fine men, is almost more than one can bear, and I cannot get used to it anyhow. It is as gruesome and awful as the first day I beheld it. Usually we find it very heavy work, unloading the ambulance wagons, carrying stretchers here, there, and everywhere, giving rides to those we call 'Sitters', viz., those

not wounded severely enough to be brought in on a stretcher, but able to sit up, and this sometimes continues all through the night, often without a moment's rest. It is now 12 p.m., and so far very few cases have yet come in; soon we may be rushed off our feet. I trust it means that our losses have greatly decreased during the past few days, and not that it has been found impossible to reach the wounded and bring them back.

The trenches we are particularly interested in lay some mile or so away, three in some cases, and as near as is reasonably safe to these trenches are fixed dressing stations. Each unit appoints its own stretcher



bearers, and it is the duty of these men to dress the wounded roughly, and get them whenever possible back to the dressing stations. Here they may receive some further attention, or may not. Our own bearers go out every night to the dressing stations, and bring the wounded back to us at our various hospitals, and then, of course, they are properly attended to. Sometimes it is necessary for our bearers to go actually into the trenches, and to places other than the recognised 'rendezvous', for the wounded, but usually the wounded are collected from them to bring to us. So all night long we receive the cases from the ambulances, and deal with them with as much despatch and yet as thoroughly as possible. About ten in the morning a motor convoy calls, and we then evacuate all cases able to be moved, so that our hospitals are emptied ready for the coming night. Very few cases remain with us for more than one night. One left us this morning which had been in for about five days. He came in seriously wounded, in a critical condition, but left us this morning with every chance of recovery. This was partly due to his own splendid pluck, for it was necessary to refuse him food and drink. He was allowed to wash his mouth out with water, however, and he had such will power that even when he was suffering from severe thirst, we could leave a cup of water by his side, and he would just rinse his mouth, but not drink any water without permission. In the surgical ward we can accommodate twenty six patients, but on a memorable occasion I packed 41 in; how and where they went to I do not know, but I do not think they felt the cold much that night. The parcels have all been very acceptable, and I am glad to say in spite of all hardships I am quite well. Please remember me to all inquiring friends."

Walter Henry Stevens Woods survived the war, born in 1886, the son of Walter and Julia of Tring. He died in 1932 in Hemel Hempstead.

10th April 1915. 1st Herts Casualties. Local men killed in their billet.

News was received in Berkhamsted on Monday that William George Green and Frank Laughton, of Berkhamsted, also Frank Marcham, of Tring, members of 'F' Coy. of the 1st Hertfordshire Regiment, had been killed whilst resting in their billet by a shell. Green of Castle-street, Berkhamsted, leaves a widow and young family. He was 36 years of age, and, at his occupation as a bootmaker, was well-known in the town. Previous to his coming to Berkhamsted he served his time in the Royal Marines, and afterwards joined the Berkhamsted National Reserves. When called up Private Green did duty as a National Reservist, but, feeling that it was his duty to get with the first battalion, if at all possible, he applied for his transfer, and had only been at the Front about six weeks when he met his death.

Laughton was only a young fellow, who did his first training with the 'Hertshires' about two years ago, at Shorncliffe. He lived with his mother in Ellesmere-road. On going to the Front by his extreme care to learn all he possibly could, his strict adherence to duty, and having no thought of fear, he won the admiration of his comrades in 'F' Coy.

Private Frank Marcham was the only son of Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Marcham, of Western-road, Tring. He was about 20 years of age, and before the war worked at Messrs. Wright and Wright, coachbuilders, Tring.

The following extracts from letters relating to the sad occurrence were received from Corporal W. Holloway, son of Mrs. Holloway, High-street, Berkhamsted, and Private J. Harrowell, the son of Mr. and Mrs. W. Harrowell, of Clarence-road.



"I suppose you will have heard before now that two of Berkhamsted's boys have been killed, Frank Laughton and George Green, and also a third – a Tring man. (This happened on March 29th). We had just had dinner; some (of 'F' Coy.) had gone to wash their mess tins and others to the cook-house, leaving only eight in the room, out of 18 or so, when a high explosive shell dropped right in the doorway. Two of us were lucky enough to get out of it without a scratch, but it did make a mess of the other poor chaps. We found one chap's feet up in the corner when we cleared out their kits. Thank God I changed my mind. I had just finished my dinner and set my mess tin down and thought I would get up and fill my water bottle, ready for the night in the trenches; but instead, lazy like, I rolled down on my blanket, exactly opposite the door, for a little nap. I had just got settled when there was such a bang, and I was smothered with falling bricks and dust, and the place was as

dark as night. It was rather a funny feeling for a second or so, wondering whether I was hit or not, but I was soon up and out of it. I could not see the others, but could hear them calling out. When we got to them one was practically dead; Laughton died as he was got out, and Green was dressed and taken to the Dressing Station, but did not live more than an hour. Another chap had a bad wound in his face, myself and another had nothing worse than a bit of a scare, but such is war. Must close now. Will (Holloway)."

"I daresay you have heard by now that two of our lads, and one from Tring, were killed by a shell, also three wounded. (Two of the wounded were Lees and Ballam, of Berkhamsted). The shell dropped plumb in our billet, behind the firing line as we were just thinking about getting ready to go up to the ditches. I was just outside, and did not get touched, except by a few lumps of dirt, etc. I heard it coming, just in time to get behind a wagon, and it dropped on the hard paving stones in the doorway, otherwise it would not have done so much damage. It blew part of the 18 inch wall away, and the damage naturally dismayed us that day, but it has made us set our teeth, and we were glad to get up to the trenches at night. We buried our three comrades in a little soldier's cemetery, close by where they were killed. We are back out of range for a few days rest (censored) up here, but I daresay we gave them as good as they sent. Jim (Harrowell)."

We have a record of Pte. Alexander Lees of Holiday Street, who was killed in action at the Somme on 23rd July 1916, this may refer to one of the two wounded soldiers in the above account. The others mentioned seem to have also survived the war.

Photos: Previous page - Boxmoor House with wounded troops and nursing staff. Above – A barrage of bursting German shells close behind the British front line trenches at the Battle of Neuve Chappelle, France, 10th – 14th March 1915.

CURATOR'S CORNER

Talking New Towns Project. With increasing demand on affordable housing, there is interest in the previous experience of building large communities such as the New Towns. DHT in partnership with Stevenage Museum and the Welwyn Hatfield Museum Service, received a grant to record new oral history interviews and publish existing interviews on a new website, which was launched on 18th February. www.talkingnewtowns.org.uk



Hemel Hempstead has a strong community history and the town centre is changing, we hope to record the establishing of the new town centre, the New Town neighbourhoods, and how resident's societies and organisations helped build and define the local communities.

So if you or your parents moved to Hemel Hempstead when it was first built we would like to talk to you about your memories of that time. Contact Nina directly at The Museum Store for further information about how to get involved.

The Museum Store is open by appointment only. For enquiries please contact Nina Glencross (Collections Manager).

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