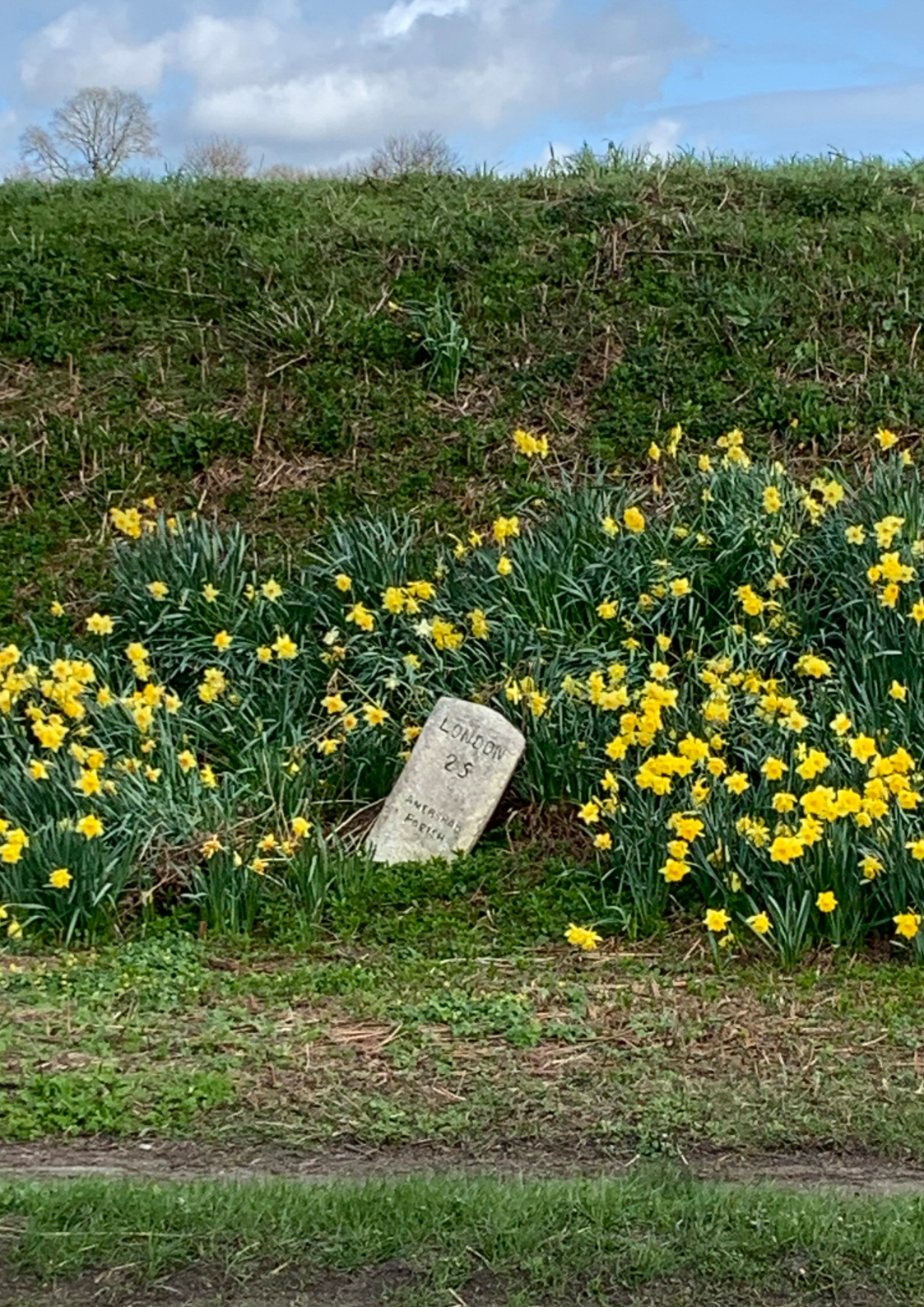


70TH
ANNIVERSARY

AMERSHAM SOCIETY



MAY 2026



LONDON
25

ANNE MARIE
BUTCH



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Cover photograph:

Market Square as it was in 1958, two years after the Society was founded © The Francis Frith Collection.

Photograph opposite:

The 25-mile stone near Amersham, one of a sequence of turnpike milestones marking the distance from London along the road toward Wendover and Aylesbury, probably installed around 1751. At that time the standard starting point for roads heading northwest out of London was Hicks Hall in St John Street, Clerkenwell, London (the modern convention is Charing Cross).

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Noticeboard

The remainder of our Programme of Talks and Events planned for 2026.

Editorial

Welcome to May's newsletter which, as you would expect, is filled with an eclectic range of articles all having a connection with Amersham. I hope you'll find them interesting.

Whilst this year is the 70th Anniversary of the Amersham Society, May is perhaps not the exact founding date as the first committee meeting was not held until 16th October 1956 – more about that in September's newsletter – but the Society's genesis was at a public meeting held in May.

In each issue our museum Director Briony Hudson contributes an article about upcoming exhibitions and activities in the museum. This month is no exception, with an article about the creative émigrés who settled in Amersham during WWII, co-written with museum Vice Chair of Trustees Alison Bailey. However, she has also written about the intriguing object pictured below and, at the last



Can you identify this object from the museum? See page 24



Tiny chocolate-box Old Amersham

minute, stepped in to give our March talk on the history of the pharmacy shop, reviewed on page 31. Thank you Briony.

Readers of The Sunday Times will have read, on 22nd March, that “*tiny chocolate-box Old Amersham*” and “*much larger modern Amersham-on-the-Hill*” featured yet again in its annual “Best Places to Live” supplement. It highlighted the “*civic-minded community*” and how music brings everybody together, with people enjoying the free summer concerts in the Memorial Gardens (maintained in “*fine floral fettle*”!). And, what caught my eye, was how the integral role of volunteering in the community was emphasised.

Too late for inclusion was the annual litter pick at the end of March. Our Community & Services Town Clerk Steve Catanach reports that “64 residents — including many young

people — joined forces to collect 62 bags of litter, which was sorted into general waste and recycling”. He went to say “that each year the number of volunteer hours we receive, supporting our efforts to improve the local environmental quality of Amersham, exceeds 2,000. This is in addition to immeasurable number of hours ATC staff spend on ensuring Amersham thrives!!” How right he is.

And volunteers came out in force on a lovely sunny day at the end of April for Amersham’s Environmental Day, with the great tagline: small changes can create ripples. There were 10 stalls (including Wild and Sustainable Amersham, Amersham Community Allotments and Chiltern Chalk Streams) along with 3 talks promoting a more sustainable way of life for us, our town and the planet.

You’ll notice in several articles there are references to previous newsletters. Just to reassure you that you needn’t panic or swear because you’ve lost the particular newsletter in question. Full versions of our newsletters from 2019 onwards are available online in pdf format, you’ll find them at: <https://www.amershamsociety.org/newsletters-and-publications/>

We have an interesting coupling of articles about two train lines separated by some 175 years. The first is about the failed attempt to build a line through the “Amersham Valley” in the mid 19th century, which was thwarted

by the then squire of Amersham, and the second is an update on the very 21st century, generally unwanted, HS2 line running almost under the Old Town.

One of the Society *raison d’être* is guarding the town’s (particularly the Old Town) environment, character and amenities by monitoring planning applications and making representations where appropriate. On pages 37 to 39 you’ll find a success story, the rejection of an application to build a Battery Storage Facility at Mop End, plus an update on Lidl’s expansion plans and news of M&S wanting to move to a new-build site in White Lion Road when the lease on their Sycamore Road store expires in 2028.

Finally, can I put in a plea, please? We are looking for volunteers to write a brief summary of just one of our eight annual talks. The reason is to bring new voices and different writing styles to our newsletter. We already enjoy a diverse range of topics from our local enthusiasts, and I’d love to see that same diversity reflected in write-ups of the talks. It does not have to be long (usually articles are ranging from just two pages to six) and we can provide the images and help out with details where needed. Please get in touch if you’re happy to take one on!

John Catton

Butterflies of the Chilterns



Now, I'm pretty sure there were members who came to our February meeting with only a passing interest in butterflies, but I'm convinced they would have left nascent lepidopterists! Our excellent, knowledgeable and enthusiastic speaker, David Dennis (who was a Trustee of Butterfly Conservation for 9 years, the last three as its Chair), took us through the incredible life cycle of the butterfly with the aid of some of his own truly amazing pictures. He highlighted the butterflies we are likely to see here in the Chilterns, how to identify them and how they survive in a hostile, predatory environment.

The UK is on the northern edge of butterflies survival range and has 60 species, 57 breeding and 3 migrants. But climate change is slowly increasing the numbers of visitors and potential colonists from continental Europe. Recent arrivals include the **Queen of Spain Fritillary**, **Long-tailed Blue** and **Large Tortoiseshell**.

Only 5 spend the winter as butterflies (the rest as eggs or caterpillars or chrysalis) and to avoid predation adopt various strategies. Hiding away on the underside of, and blending in with, a leaf in the case of the **Brimstone**, one of the first butterflies you'll see in spring. The **Comma** adopts an intricate camouflage and could be mistaken for a dead leaf. Whilst the flamboyant **Peacock** adopts scare tactics: when

hibernating, its wings are closed exposing nondescript dark brown undersides, however if it is disturbed by, say, a mouse or blue tit, it flashes its wings to display what looks like an owl's face!

And it's not just in their pre-butterfly life stages that they are vulnerable. During their brief life as adults they are prey to dragonflies, bats and birds which will catch them on the wing. There are also spider webs to be ensnared in and opportunistic frogs lurking in the vegetation should they land.

The lifecycle of the butterfly has four stages: egg, caterpillar, chrysalis and adult. Female butterflies lay tiny eggs on specific host plants, the food source for the caterpillars when they hatch. After a few days or weeks (in the case of the Peacock, 10 days), the egg hatches into a caterpillar (larva). The caterpillar can only do two things, walk and eat! As it grows it sheds its skin several times and when fully grown, it forms a chrysalis (pupa). Inside, the caterpillar's body morphs into a butterfly. After one to three weeks, an adult butterfly slowly emerges, dries its wings and flies away to feed on nectar and reproduce, continuing the lifecycle.



The caterpillar of the Orange-tip butterfly by David Dennis (note the silken thread spun to anchor it to the stem)



Here are just some of the butterflies we'll see locally:

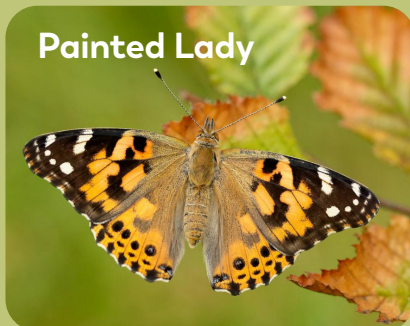
Orange-tip



A male Orange-tip butterfly in May, taken at sunset on Cholesbury Common by David Dennis

The easily recognisable Orange-tip. This beautiful spring butterfly emerges in April and can be seen on the wing till mid June. Their favoured habitat is wood margins, clearings and gardens, and plants of choice for laying their eggs are Ladies Smock, Garlic Mustard and Cuckoo Flower.

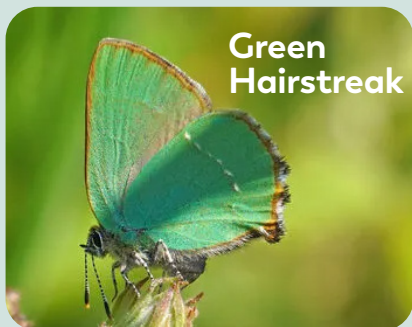
Painted Lady



Painted Lady ©Butterfly Conservation

The Painted Lady butterfly which follows a remarkable multi-generation migration cycle. It breeds during winter in North Africa, especially in countries like Morocco, where seasonal rains support host plants for its caterpillars. In spring, adult butterflies migrate north into Europe, reaching the UK from April onwards.

Rather than one butterfly completing the full journey, the migration usually happens over several generations. One generation moves from North Africa into Southern Europe, and the next continues further north, to the UK. Here the female lay her eggs on plants such as thistles, producing a new generation that develops locally during summer. These UK-born butterflies then migrate south again in autumn. In 2019 an estimated 1m migrated to the UK.



**Green
Hairstreak**

Green Hairstreak © BBOWT

A stronghold for the Green Hairstreak is Ivinghoe Beacon where it can be seen flying between late April and early July. The males are highly territorial, seeing off any rivals whilst the females spend time amongst potential egg laying plants, the food sources for their caterpillar offspring, such as Gorse, Bird's-foot Trefoil and Blackberry.



Marbled White

Marbled White © BBOWT

Rather than laying her eggs carefully on a specific leaf the Marbled White lays her eggs singly while flying, scattering them over tall grasses. They land in rough grassland where the caterpillars will later feed. The Marbled White has a short flight period between late June and early August and can be found in the Chilterns on the chalk grassland.



Purple Emperor

Male Purple Emperor © David Dennis

The Purple Emperor, whilst not common, is one of the most charismatic and second largest of our butterflies. They display a sexual dimorphism with the female being larger than the male and lacking the purple sheen. Interestingly enough, David explained, the male is not in fact purple, the “colour” is created by light being refracted from the million scales on their wings. It lives high up in oak trees in the Chilterns woodlands and will fly up to defend its territory from other butterflies – and even from birds! It lays its eggs on willow. Their flight period is mid June to mid August.

Dennis ended by explaining how to distinguish between three species of blue butterflies we see here in the Chilterns, something which has always confused me! At a distance they look similar, clues to their identity are found in their flight period and location.

John Catton

Holly Blue



Holly Blue © BBOWT

Seen in early spring flying high and common in parks and gardens.

Chalkhill Blue



Chalkhill Blue © BBOWT

Almost indistinguishable from the Common Blue, is on the wing in July and August on chalk grassland, so really unlikely in your garden.

Common Blue



Seen flying low in May, June and July. Found throughout Britain.

Common Blue © Butterfly Conservation

Walking the Beat to Nirvana – Mervyn Edwards



At our January meeting we heard a fascinating talk by a seemingly affable, mild-mannered man, but a man whose 30-year career in the Thames Valley Police Force had taken him to some very challenging places indeed, places where courage, composure, discipline and determination would have been among the qualities called for.

Mervyn Edwards, a young bus driver in Banbury and recently married, had long thought of being a policeman. His wife encouraged him to follow his dreams. He had a local interview, hoping that he would be recruited to work in Banbury – ‘I knew most of the villains in Banbury; I had been to school with them!’ Instead, he was posted to Chesham, a town he admitted he had never heard of but one he got to know well as a Patrol Officer for 3 years in Chesham, Amersham and Little Chalfont. In 1972, as the local patrol-man, he was sent to the National Defence College at Latimer (now the De Vere Latimer hotel) where there had been an explosion. In those days, such incidents were most commonly gas explosions, but this proved to be a bomb planted by the IRA. Mervyn was first on the scene. A little later, when there was a firearms incident in Chesham, he met members of one of Thames Valley Police’s Tactical Firearms Teams. They did not know Chesham, and

he spent time with them sharing his local knowledge. These experiences clearly whetted his appetite: Mervyn applied to join the Tactical Firearms Team and was accepted.

While waiting to take up his new role, Mervyn and a female police officer were driving to HM Prison Holloway in London with a woman who had been remanded to custody at Amersham Court. Mervyn's colleague, a Yorkshirewoman, did not know London, so Mervyn suggested they took the scenic route back to Chesham so that she could see some of the sights. They drove to Piccadilly Circus and circled the statue of Eros, at that time on an island in the middle of a roundabout. In fact, they circled it twice – to savour the moment. On down Piccadilly, past the Ritz, past the entrance to Green Park Underground Station. Mervyn reckoned that it was no more than 10 seconds after passing the station when a bomb exploded. An improvised explosive device. The IRA again. Smoke, dust, one fatality, lots of injured, mayhem. Within minutes, the emergency services began to arrive, but inevitably Mervyn and his colleague were first on the scene. A fleeting thought – what if the bombers had planted a small bomb with the intention of exploding a larger one once the emergency services had arrived. Thought dismissed – get on with the job. There were other practical difficulties: back then, Thames Valley Police's radios and the Met's radios could not speak to each other. A Met officer was thoroughly confused to understand how two police officers

from Chesham could be first on the scene. Back in Chesham next day, when Mervyn and his colleague were writing up their reports, and only then, they speculated on what might have been if they had circled Eros a third time and had, as a result, passed Green Park Station just a few seconds later than they did.

So, to the Tactical Firearms Team, one of four at that time in the Thames Valley Police Force, each with a sergeant and 10 constables. The normal expectation was that members of the team would retire from it after 3 years or so because of the demands of the role, its intense nature and complicated work. Mervyn in fact stayed with the team for 6 years before being promoted to sergeant at Gerrards Cross. During his career he was also posted to Slough, a contrasting experience which prompted him to reflect that Gerrards Cross was a terrific place in which to live and a wonderful place to work; Slough was a wonderful place to work. We knew what he meant.

Mervyn stayed at Gerrards Cross for only 18 months before returning to the Firearms Team as sergeant for another 4½ years. Back then to Gerrards Cross as an Inspector for 8 months before being recalled again to the Firearms Team as an Inspector for another 4½ years, a total of 15 years in a world which most of us know little about. So, what stories did Mervyn have to tell? Two experiences which many years later featured in television documentaries: One concerned the murder of PC Yvonne Fletcher by a gunman firing from inside the Libyan

Embassy in London in 1984; the other was about the projected visit of Idi Amin, the Ugandan President, to London for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 1978. Mervyn had been involved in both events, but the Official Secrets Act had prevented him from talking to anyone about his experiences. Indeed, it was complete news to his wife when he told her while watching the programmes, 'I was involved in that'.

The murder of Yvonne Fletcher was followed by an 11-day siege of the Embassy, at the end of which all those inside were expelled from the country and the UK severed diplomatic relations with Libya. Mervyn spoke of the emotional difficulty faced by some of the police officers involved in the exercise; they had known and worked with Yvonne Fletcher and faced a personal loss. The siege ended when a police team, including Mervyn, was charged with taking the hostages to a property in Berkshire where they would be interrogated by a Home Office official. It was made very clear to the team that they should not in any circumstance speak to the hostages. Once the interrogation had been completed the police took the hostages to Heathrow where they were put on a flight back to Libya.

Uganda had been granted independence from the United Kingdom in 1962. Idi Amin, then Commander of the Ugandan army, had however seized power in 1971 and ruled increasingly in brutal, dictatorial fashion. In 1978 he made it clear that, Uganda being a member

of the Commonwealth, he would attend the quadrennial meeting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government to be hosted that year in London by Queen Elizabeth II. All members of the four Firearms Teams were called to report to a disused army camp in the depths of Oxfordshire for a week's specialist training in readiness for Amin's visit. They were briefed by a very senior Home Office official: the plan was that Amin's plane would be diverted to a military airfield where the teams' responsibility would be to arrest Amin for the atrocities he was alleged to have committed over several years. What about Amin's bodyguards? They would be handled by a highly trained specialist military unit (the best in the world, Mervyn said). The Firearms Teams were now to develop their own plan for arresting Amin. Throughout that difficult week, one of the Firearms Teams took the role of the baddies while different strategies were practised and developed. Day One was carnage, almost everyone involved being 'shot'. But by the end of the week a Plan A, with back-up plans B and C, had been tried and tested. Several weeks later, the police teams were asked to report to the Police HQ in Kidlington, where they were told that Amin's plane had taken off from Entebbe Airport on its way to Heathrow. The teams went off to run through their plan but were then told that the plane had returned to Entebbe without leaving Ugandan airspace. Not a word of this story appeared in the public domain until the Government released the papers from the protection of the

Official Secrets Act under the 30-year rule. The Times newspaper, reporting on the story, claimed that the plan had been to assassinate Amin on his arrival at Heathrow. That was very definitely not so, Mervyn assured us. That would have been murder, and that was not what the Firearms Team was about.

Mervyn told other stories. Of breaking into a house in the middle of the night to arrest a man who was thought to have shot and killed another. But before bursting in, think! What if he is sitting in a chair with his gun in his lap? What if there is a child in the house when the police force entry, a child who could be traumatised for life? Of being on duty at Chequers (after the IRA bombing of the Brighton hotel hosting the Tory Party conference in 1984), where Mrs Thatcher was spending Christmas. Mervyn and his team on duty on Christmas Day and Mrs Thatcher, her husband and daughter brought a huge Christmas cake and other goodies to their quarters after lunch. Of the importance of humour sometimes to lighten the stress and tension associated with all that the teams did. Of his 3 years as the Superintendent in charge of the team policing the construction of the Newbury By Pass, handling amongst other things the activities of the tree-dwellers. All and

more are covered in Mervyn's book, 'Walking the Beat to Nirvana'. Why Nirvana? We didn't quite get to that, so if you really want to know, you will have to buy the book!

Mervyn ended his career as a Chief Superintendent with a seat on a national working group planning to deal with Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Terrorism. He had a particular responsibility to develop a training package to equip specialist officers in every police force in the UK to combat such issues.

Mervyn spoke to us at the end of January. By that date, 2026 had already brought news of extremely aggressive government oppression of ordinary people concerned only to voice their opinions on government policy. We think of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement service (ICE) in Minneapolis, and of the thousands of protesters killed in Iran. Against that background, it is impossible not to admire and be grateful for the utter professionalism, the discipline and control, the focused planning, the extensive training and the humane morality of the Tactical Firearms Teams in the UK. We are fortunate indeed.

David Cash



Specialities of . .

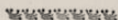
J. HATCH & SONS,

Chair Manufacturers,

Wheilden Gate,

AMERSHAM,

Bucks.



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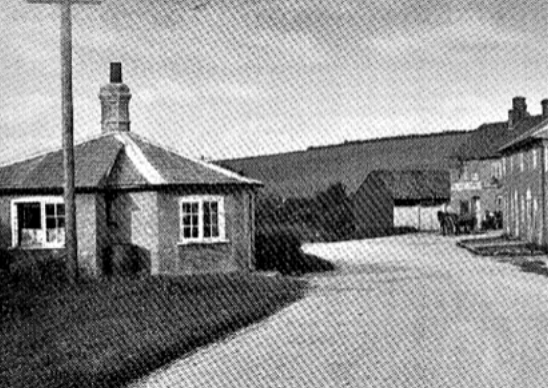


J. HATCH & SONS – CHAIR MANUFACTURERS.

For nearly one hundred years, three generations of the Hatch family ran a chair-making business at Whielden Gate, just past the original junction of the lane to Winchmore Hill with the main Amersham to High Wycombe road. This is an abridged version of an article written by Joseph Hatch's grandson, Richard Ayres, for the Chiltern Society's "Chalk, Cherries and Chairs" project in 2021. It's fascinating insofar it combines an industry associated with the Chilterns, local social history and a family very much associated with Amersham.

The Hatch family's chair-making business began in the mid-1840s when David Hatch (1815-1885), the son of Daniel Hatch, a saddler in Amersham, set up a workshop at Whielden Gate.

According to the 1841 census, David was a 25-year-old chair-maker living with his wife Elizabeth and their 3-year-old daughter in Cherry Lane in the hamlet of Woodrow. By the time of the 1851 census, David had moved to the house called 'Hollandsdean' near Whielden Gate, where he was described as a 'chair manufacturer'. It is possible that his rise in status from chair-maker to chair manufacturer resulted from his being left £100 by his uncle who died around 1845.



Toll house, with The Queen's Head in the background (Amersham Museum)

The factory was built on the land to the left of the lane going towards Winchmore Hill, which was occupied on a 'copyhold' basis (a traditional form of tenancy where the owner is a wealthy landowner) from the Shardeloes estate, owned by the Tyrwhitt-Drakes, squires of Amersham. Between the factory and the Queens Head, on the opposite side of the road, stood a toll house built around 1879 when the road from Amersham to High Wycombe was turnpiked.

David also is recorded as a 'chair manufacturer' at Whielden Gate in the censuses of 1861 and 1871. His sons John, George, Joseph and William are all described as chair-makers in the 1871 census, all living with, and presumably working alongside, their father.

As the 19th century progressed, there was a growing number of employees in the chair workshops, and a resulting decline in the number of chair bodgers working in the woods. The 1861 census indicates, David Hatch had three apprentices at Whielden Gate, but there is no record of any specialisation of labour, and there is no indication of specialisms in subsequent censuses.

It would seem that the chair factory had passed to David's son Joseph by the time of the 1881 census. Joseph was probably born in 'Hollandsdean', as the 1851 census lists him there as a one-year-old. He is listed as a 'scholar' in 1861. This was some 15 years before the introduction of universal elementary education and the term 'scholar' was often used to indicate an apprentice. In 1871 he was working at Whielden Gate alongside his father David.

By 1881 he had married Hannah Taylor from Chalfont St. Giles, and had evidently taken over the running of the chair factory from his father, as he was living there with Hannah and five children – William aged 9, Laura 8, Joseph David 6, Mary Ann 4, and Frederick 1. They went on to have seven more children – Elizabeth, Edith, Edward, Henrietta, Archer, Elsie and a second William, the first William having died aged 14. The photograph below of the family was taken in 1896 after they had moved to Woodrow Farm. The elderly man in the photograph is assumed to be Hannah's father.



Hatch family 1896, taken outside Woodrow Farm



Joseph Hatch standing outside Childs Farm

Towards the end of the 19th century, industrialisation of chair production began with the introduction of machine tools. In the early 1900s, a plank-cutting machine was installed at the Whielden Gate factory, marking the end of saw pits.

After 1881, Joseph and his family moved to Winchmore Hill, on the opposite side of the common to The Plough Inn. In the 1891 census Joseph was listed there as a farmer and chair-maker: he was farming as a tenant of Earl Howe of Penn. Sometime after 1891 the family moved to Woodrow Farm, part of the Shardeloes estate, but Joseph was still farming Earl Howe's land in Winchmore Hill whilst running the factory.

In the 1920s he is listed as a farmer at Childs Farm, Woodrow, part of the Shardeloes estate. And his chair-making business was known as 'J. Hatch and Sons', as Joseph David, Frederick, Archer and William were all involved in it to a greater or lesser degree.

The business evidently prospered. Joseph began to accumulate property,

buying cottages and having new houses built in Winchmore Hill, and later owning property in Hazlemere. He purchased Nos. 1 to 7 in The Row, Winchmore Hill, as early as 1887.

At some point in the 1930s, Joseph must have passed the chair-making business to his two eldest sons, Joseph David (known as Joe, 1874-1962) and Frederick (1879-1938).

On Joseph's death, in 1943, the gross value of the estate was £9,895 (equivalent to about £470,000 today) of which £5,332 was property. He left 'freehold land at Winchmore Hill together with the 14 messuages or dwelling houses thereon' to his son William, and a payment of £3 a week to William's wife Ethel should be made 'for as long as she remains a widow'.

No mention is made of his son Joseph David, who had already inherited the chair factory. Frederick had died in 1938.

In the early years of the 20th century the Hatch chair factory probably reached its peak of production. During this period Joe was jointly running the factory with his father and his brothers. He was still taking chairs to London by horse and cart. At that time both sides of the Wycombe Road and Whielden Lane were used to store timber harvested from the beechwoods. Some 30 to 40 men worked at the factory in its heyday, and in addition the company employed outworkers living in the surrounding villages from as far away as Speen. Wood and cane were delivered to their cottages for turning and caning. Local people

used to visit the factory to collect woodcuttings, firewood and sawdust.

The early years of Joe's marriage to Kate were spent in 'Hope Cottage', opposite Amersham station. He moved here because his role at the time was to market the company's chairs in London, and he travelled there by train. 'Hope Cottage' had only recently been built opposite The Railway Hotel (later The Iron Horse, demolished in 2004). Joe was in the Buckinghamshire Yeomanry, and the photograph below, taken in 1904, shows him in uniform on horseback outside the cottage. As a member of the Yeomanry he was present on Coombe Hill at the unveiling of the monument to those who died in the Boer War.

Sometime between 1907 and 1911, the family moved to Coleshill, to live in one of a pair of Victorian cottages near the windmill called 'Clivia Villas' (now converted to one dwelling called 'Hill Cottage' after a period when it was called 'Clivia').



*The Hatch chair factory, about 1910
(Stuart King Archive)*

The chair-making business continued to prosper and Joe purchased two cottages opposite Coleshill church and next to The Red Lion. He converted them into a single dwelling which he named 'Moorwood' (now 'Morewood') and the family had moved into it by 1926.

Joe worked a 12-hour day at the factory, 7am to 7pm, and in the summer he used to work in the garden after arriving home; the family were self-sufficient in vegetables. His wife Kate never had to go shopping for food as provisions were delivered by van, though occasionally she visited Freddy Fuller's emporium in Whielden Street, Amersham, and specialist shopping was done in High Wycombe.

In 1936 Joe, Kate and their remaining unmarried daughter Edith moved to a house at the bottom of First Avenue, Amersham, and Joe named the house 'Moorwood' after the house in Coleshill. The move was prompted by the fact that Edith had started work in the office of builder Robin Brazil in Amersham and Joe did not want her to walk there all the way from Coleshill, (though she had walked from Coleshill to Dr Challoner's Grammar School in Amersham-on-the-Hill when she was a teenager).

Foreign timber imports began to reduce the need for Chiltern beechwood, and towards the end of the 1930s the small rural chair factories also began to decline when faced with competition from the larger enterprises, mainly in High Wycombe. With the death of his brother

Frederick, Joe was left to manage and market the firm single-handedly. He wound up the company and sold the Whielden Lane premises to the Dunmore brothers, timber merchants, at the start of the Second World War. The buildings were destroyed by fire in the early 1950s. The site was turned into a picnic area in the 1970s or 1980s, but by 2019 it was no longer managed and is now totally overgrown with trees.

Joe died at his home in Amersham in 1962, and Kate at a nursing home in Beaconsfield in 1969. Their ashes were interred in Penn Street churchyard, but no headstone was ever erected. The church records of burial sites were inadvertently destroyed, so the location of the grave will remain a mystery.

What of the other sons? Archer (1889-1974), who according to the records of Woodrow school seemed to be prone to ill-health, was the only one of Joseph Hatch's children to attend secondary school. He left Woodrow school on 22 January 1901 and 'proceeded to the Grammar School'. This would have been the old Dr Challoner's premises in Amersham Market Square.

Archer served in the First World War, joining the army in 1915, then leaving it, probably as the result of an injury, but then re-joined it in 1918. His occupation when he first joined the army was given as 'bailiff'. Although he worked in the factory, the precise business relationship with his father is not clear. In Joseph's will he is described as a 'wood sawyer', but he was known to also have worked on his father's farm.



William Hatch (1894-1977) was Joseph Hatch's youngest son. He served in the trenches in the First World War.

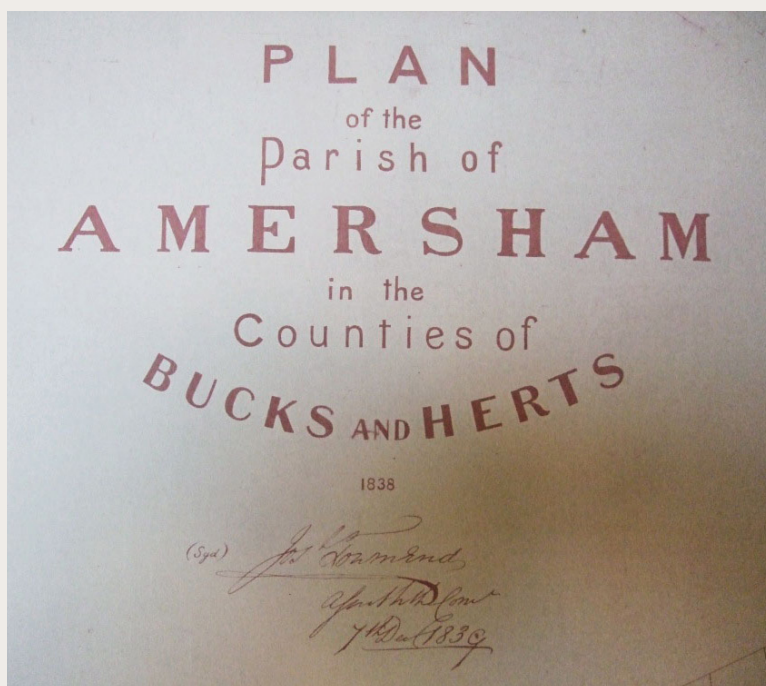
He worked for his father, seemingly as an employee rather than as a partner: towards the end of Joseph's life he was being paid £3 a week, £1 less than some of the men. At one time he lived in the old toll house (demolished in 1925 for road widening) which was situated on the opposite side of Whielden Lane to the chair factory.

While living in the toll house, William was the first to arrive at the factory to open it up and the last to leave after locking up. In 1926 or 1927 he and his family moved to Woodrow where they stayed until moving to 'Kingsbury' near the Lord Nelson pub in Winchmore Hill.

William continued to work at what had become a timber factory at Whielden Gate after his brother sold it. After it was destroyed by fire he went to work at the Dancer and Hearne chair factory in Penn Street until his retirement. His father must have been turning in his grave – Dancer and Hearne were arch rivals of the Hatch's!

William died in 1977, one year after his wife Ethel.

John Catton. With acknowledgement to Richard Ayres and the Chiltern Society.



The Amersham Railway

PART 1

In our Newsletter of May last year, Wendy Tibbitts wrote about failed plans to drive (or should it be dig?) a canal through Old Amersham. She has now turned her attention to another failed attempt to drive a transport link through the Old Town, this time the building (or perhaps laying down?) of a railway line linking London and Banbury. Wendy has done a huge amount of research into the background to the the rejected proposal and this article is the first part of a three. Wendy is an old friend of the Amersham Society, keeping in touch since moving to Dorset in 2015. She was a volunteer with the museum for 25 years, the last 10 years, as a Trustee.

The first settlers in Amersham took advantage of the fertile river valley, and as the centuries went by the valley became the main coaching route from London to Aylesbury. Already a thriving farming community the additional hospitality trade made the town prosperous. However, as transport systems evolved, its convenient location was almost its downfall.

The Industrial Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century brought the first major transport change when there was a rush to build a network of canals to carry goods. A canal was proposed to run along the Misbourne Valley and through Amersham but the landowners along its route refused to sell their land (see Wendy's article "The canal with no water" in May 2025 newsletter)

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the emergence of steam engines that could run on rails, saw a plethora of new companies applying to Parliament, all eager to build railway lines to link major towns and cities. As the first applications were being considered there was significant resistance from landowners, but by 1841 the Great Western Railway was operating its line from London to Bristol, and slowly, as people began to see the advantage of having a local rail link, the race began for other companies to construct rail lines to join major cities. Each railway line proposal required an Act of Parliament, and these companies had to raise subscriptions in the form of shares to fund the construction of the railway whilst promising large

dividends to shareholders. By August 1845 the Buckinghamshire Railway Company, headed by the Duke of Buckingham, was proposing to build a line from London which passed north of Uxbridge, and followed the valley through, Chalfont, Amersham, Missenden and Wendover to Aylesbury.¹ From there it would extend to Buckingham, passing Brackley and terminate near Banbury. The list of subscribers included the great and the good from all the major towns and included major landowners in The Lee and Chalfont St. Giles. The squire of Amersham, Mr. T.T. Drake, was noticeable by his absence in the list. Two months later the company was amalgamated with the London and Birmingham Railway Company, which was already operating through Hertfordshire into London. As a result, the Company's operation concentrated on connecting Midland towns and the South Buckinghamshire proposal was forgotten.

The 1840 Amersham Tithe register lists all the land-owners in the parish, and from it we can see that almost all the land was owned by the Drake family. This gave them control of land use which for them was farming and country sports. For generations the family were keen sportsmen, and they wanted to preserve their hunting grounds. Any obstruction, such as a railway line that traversed their property, would be an obstacle to their favourite pastime. After the 1845 proposal no more Railway Companies approached the Drakes with railway plans for Amersham. Thomas Tyrwhitt



Drake died in March 1852 and was succeeded by his son of the same name.

By now, the successful joining of towns and cities by railways was demonstrating the advantages of a rail link. Coal was cheaper to the population who received their supply from the railway coal yards. Traders could get a higher price for their goods if they could supply them quickly and cheaply via the railway. The passenger traffic was increasing because the alternative was a slow, bumpy, carriage ride. The Amersham townspeople saw the difference a rail link made to other towns, and wanted a rail link of their own. Now that the old Squire was dead, they were hopeful that there would be a change of attitude from the new Squire.

On 2 September 1852, nearly 100 Amersham ratepayers got together at the Griffin Hotel to discuss applying to Parliament to build a railway line through the town that would connect with London and Worcester. The consensus was that a railway station in Amersham would mean lower County and Parochial Rates and increase the prosperity of farmers who could send their produce to London markets. It would also increase the value of local land and houses and encourage wealthier families to move into the town. Those at the meeting knew that the one obstacle to their plan was the Squire. A long, open letter, very polite and respectful, outlining the advantages of a railway, was published in local papers addressed to Mr T.T. Drake, putting the ratepayers'

¹www.britishnewspapersarchive.co.uk - Sun (London) - Fri 08 Aug 1845

²www.britishnewspapersarchive.co.uk - Bucks Advertiser & Aylesbury News - Sat 04 Sept 1852

³www.britishnewspapersarchive.co.uk - Oxford Journal - Sat 02 Oct 1852

case for Amersham to have a railway station.² At the same time they sent a deputation to Shardeloes to speak to the Squire who received them courteously, but they could not persuade him. He opposed the scheme, not just because it would cut through his estate, but because he felt it would be detrimental to the town and the Amersham valley.

At this time Amersham was a rural town whose main industry was agriculture, but it had the added benefit of being on a main coaching route. The extra trade from the coach companies kept the many inns busy supplying the needs of the travellers. The Drake family had looked after its inhabitants by building the Market Hall and the Almshouses; and they owned many of the inns and High Street houses. Preserving the antiquity of the town was a priority for them and they were not going to let any new-fangled transport systems interfere with that.

Undaunted, the townspeople published a further letter in the newspapers, dated 10 September 1852, this time from the Chairman of the meeting, William Weller. He lamented that the deputation failed to convince the Squire of the benefits of the railway to the town's economy and that they, as businessmen had "a practical acquaintance with certain details that cannot have come within the range of your observation". William Weller also proposed that the railway line could be hidden from Mr Drake's park, by it passing through a tunnel under Frame Field. He also offered to send a railway engineer to meet with Mr Drake to



discuss the points he wanted to be avoided. William Weller expressed his conviction that Mr Drake wanted the best for the citizens of Amersham but asked him to re-consider his opposition, "in which you stand alone". Printed under this public letter was another one from Mr T.T. Drake. Short and to the point, he said: "I can only express my regret that my views respecting a Railway in the Amersham Valley are not in accordance with your own."³ The new Squire, although only 34, was of the same mind-set as his father in protecting his land, but times were changing. Since the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, agriculture was now in a free market and to be competitive agricultural produce had to be sold in major cities to get the best prices. To reach these markets the railway was needed. The businessmen of Amersham were frustrated in their efforts to bring the railway to Amersham. All their hopes and plans hinged on the opinion of one man. They were not to know then, that this major landowner would suggest a solution that would keep everyone happy.

Wendy Tibbitts

What's that object?



The mystery object is a Roman perfume vial from the Amersham Museum's collection, found while field-walking* in Mantles Green in the 1980s. We know that the Romans settled in the Amersham area around 2,000 years ago, likely drawn by the rich farmland. In the 1980s, both Iron Age and Roman finds were uncovered during the construction of the Amersham by-pass and from an archaeological excavation at Mantles Green. Field walking has also revealed Roman coins, bricks and tiles, pottery, bronze bowls and ornaments.

Evidence of Roman settlements have been uncovered from as early as the 1750s, with Roman coins from the time of the self-styled emperor Carausius in the third century found during the creation of Shardeloes lake. In a letter dated 30 September 1753, J Collins wrote to the Reverend Dr Stukely, Queen Square, London: "A great number of that emperor's [Carausius] coins was found near that place [Amersham] about 2 years ago, as Mr Drake was making a large sheet of water which covers 40 acres,

but most of 'em are in the hands of the lord of the manor. The workmen, as they were digging, laid open a curious burial field, in the form of a minced pye, built with flints, several bodys found therein, some with ear-rings, all dropt to dust soon after they were exposed to the air. Near to that place I discovered a Roman pavement, & took up several bricks, about an inch square out of the margin of the pavement, of divers colours. Mr Drake has been acquainted with it, & said he durst not open it till a proper opportunity, for fear the workmen's shovels damage it, & nothing has been done since."

Mr Collins' reference to the "pavement of divers colours" obviously indicates the remains of a mosaic floor. It seems likely that there was a villa on the Mantles Green site, although it has never been found. Evidence of an outbuilding, with facilities for iron making, have also been discovered. Tantalisingly, we are unlikely to ever know more about the identity of the Roman inhabitant who owned the perfume vial.

Briony Hudson

*Field-walking is an archaeological technique involving the systematic walking across a ploughed field to recover artifacts and gather data about past human activity.

Amersham's creative community in the 1940s

Amersham Museum's "Destination Amersham" theme will continue throughout 2026, with a new temporary exhibition opening in July that explores the émigré artists, musicians, composers, writers, photographers and sculptors who made their home here during World War Two. This cosmopolitan community thrived in the local area, in spite of their distance from home and ongoing anguish about their family and friends left in Central Europe.

A cornerstone of the Museum's collection is the seven paintings completed by Austrian-born Marie-Louise von Motesiczky (1906-1996) during the 1940s and 1950s in Amersham. These were acquired by the Museum with the kind support of the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust. After the annexation of Austria (Anschluss) by Germany in 1938, Marie-Louise and her mother Henriette fled Vienna to Amsterdam, London and later Amersham, where they were joined by their housekeeper Marie Hauptmann. They settled on Chestnut Lane in 1940 surrounded by their Viennese furniture, until they moved to Hampstead in 1960 [See Amersham Society Newsletter May 2024].

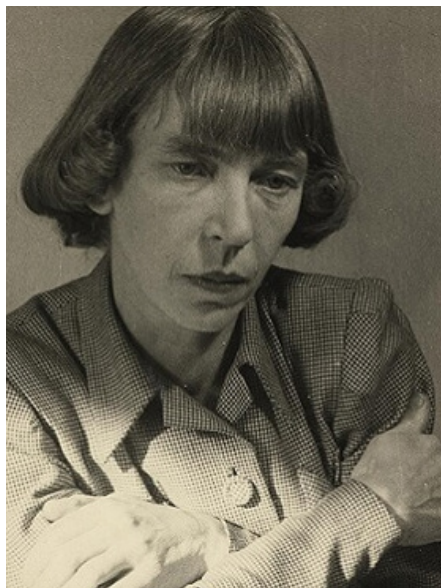
The Motesiczky's were also surrounded by the library of author Elias Canetti (1905-1994). Born in Bulgaria, the Canetti family moved to Manchester in 1911, but after his father's sudden death a year later, they moved back to Europe, first to



Nobel laureate Elias Canetti and artist Marie-Louise von Motesiczky in the Motesiczky's house, Cornerways, on Chestnut Lane (© Tate).

Switzerland. Elias moved to Vienna to study chemistry in 1924, but – like the Motesiczky's – fled after the Anschluss with his wife Veza. Canetti was billeted with Reverend Gordon Milburn on Stubbs Wood. His relationship with Marie-Louise led to a complicated arrangement including her housing of his library. His posthumously published memoir *Party in the Blitz* (2003) gives an insight into his four years in the town. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1981 "for writings marked by a broad outlook, a wealth of ideas and artistic power".

Other visitors included the Czech poet and anthropologist Franz Baermann Steiner (1909-1952) and the Austrian expressionist Oskar Kokoschka (1886-1980),



Sculptor Mary Duras, 1946 (© Tate)



Marie-Louise with Veza Canetti in her studio at Cornerways

who was a major influence on Marie-Louise's work.

Marie-Louise's choice of Amersham as a refuge from London is probably explained by her relationship with Czech-born sculptor Mary Duras (1898-1982). Mary, the older by 10 years, was an established sculptor in Prague who exhibited her work throughout Europe and was awarded a gold medal at the International Exhibition in Paris in 1937. Planning to hold an exhibition here, she arrived in March 1938, just as German troops marched into Czechoslovakia. As a member of the anti-Nazi group Prager Secession she successfully applied for refugee status and initially relied on support from the Czech Refugee Trust Fund. Her Jewish husband, Arnold Schück, was unable to follow her. He was deported to Auschwitz which he survived, but his health never fully recovered.



*Composer and concert pianist
Francesco Ticciati*

Having known each other since the 1920s, Marie-Louise may have followed Mary out to Amersham in 1941. Mary chose her country escape by spreading a map out and allowing her finger to fall at random. Her haphazard selection was Amersham, but she couldn't find accommodation in the overcrowded town and ended up at Wendover Dean. In 1939 Mary was taken in with another Czech refugee, Ilona Kauders, by agricultural foreman and engineering contractor Fred and Evangeline (Eva) Puddephatt. They even let her use part of the kitchen as her sculpture studio! Two years later artist Augusta 'Dussie' North offered her lodgings and more space for her studio in a converted barn at Small Dean Farm nearby. Her work during this period included busts of Marie-Louise, Winston Churchill and Jan Masaryk (see "The Czech Government in Exile in Bucks during WWII", Newsletter September 2024) who was Foreign Minister of Czechoslovakia from

1940 to 1948. Masaryk was based, for much of the war, in Wingrave, near Aylesbury.

Another hub of multi-cultural creativity in this period was the Music Studio on Chestnut Close which was owned by writer, concert pianist and music teacher Mrs Georgina Pearce (nee Hoby). Mrs Pearce's lodger was Dr Francesco Ticciati (1893-1949), a composer, concert pianist, lecturer and piano teacher. Born in Italy, he came to London as a music student and lived in Maida Vale until 1939. He then moved to Amersham first lodging with Mr Darvill at Flint House, Woodside Road, until moving into the Music Studio around 1941.

Mabel Brailsford's wartime diaries, held in the Museum's archives, give us a fascinating insight into the Music Studio in the early 1940s. As well as being a centre for teaching music, it also hosted classical concerts and



Mabel Brailsford

musical talks. Around March 1942 Dr Ticciati gave a series of recital talks on Beethoven. On the last Sunday of each month there was what Mabel Brailsford calls a “literary-philosophical-religious” meeting with “the discussions following... generally the best part”. Talks included two by Reverend Milburn who was an authority on Indian scriptures, but instead focussed on his ideas of how religion should help to build the new world after the War. In 1943 at least two of the speakers were non-local friends of Ticciati. Dr Victor Grove gave a talk on China, and Mr Kenning, a parson in the Church of England, gave an address which Mabel Brailsford said “could in part have come from a Methodist pulpit”.

Some the singers and musicians who took part in the concerts were students or friends of Mrs Pearce and Dr Ticciati, including the Spanish violinist Angel Grande, mezzo-soprano Hendra Porges-Lilienfeld and singer Frieda Danziger who was billeted at Flint House, Woodside Road.

Mabel Brailsford, a pianist herself, describes the Music Studio as “changing her whole world”. She would make the journey from London Road, Old Amersham, to Chestnut Close pushing her bicycle up Station Road and riding back in the black-out. When there wasn't a concert or a talk she had an Italian lesson from Ticciati, or just generally helped out when either Ticciati or Mrs Pearce were unwell. Not only did she describe Ticciati's music as “never

in my life at any concert have I heard such playing”, but appears to have found the cross-section of people she met there stimulating and fascinating.

Music provided the catalyst for another émigré couple, Laelia and Walter Goehr (1903-1960). Walter, a composer, conductor and arranger, and Laelia came to England in the 1930s with their baby son, Peter Alexander, known as Sandy. At the start of World War Two, the family moved out to Amersham, settling at 17 Batchelors Way. Russian-born Laelia Rivlin (1908-2002) showed talent as pianist and attended the conservatoire in Kiev at a young age. As a wealthy Jew, her father fled for his life after the Bolshevik Revolution and Laelia and her mother managed to escape in 1921 to join him in Berlin. At boarding school Laelia met Rosa Goldstein, another gifted pianist and Russian émigré. They also shared a love of American popular music and improvisation, both strictly forbidden to classical music students. As ‘Lil



*Walter and Laelia Goehr
(photo courtesy of Julia Crockatt)*

and Peggy Stone' they established a successful cabaret act, The Stone Sisters, which toured Weimar Germany and throughout Europe.

Laelia's music career ended when she met Walter at a party given by the future Hollywood film director Billy Wilder who was Rosa's boyfriend at the time. They married in 1931 but the rise of Nazism meant that this was an exceedingly difficult time for the young couple. Walter's employer, theatre owner Erwin Piscator, had his company forcibly closed when he appeared on a Nazi blacklist because he sympathised with the German working class. As a Jew, and now also branded a leftist, Walter could no longer find work. He was sacked from his job as a composer on Berlin Radio on 10 August 1932, the day his son Alexander was born.

Walter was extremely lucky to be offered a role as music director with The Gramophone Company in London, who sent money to him with which they were able to buy a car. They immediately drove to Cologne to stay with Peggy, and then onto England to start a new life. They initially lived in Wembley before moving to Amersham in 1939. James Grey, the head of The Gramophone Company lived locally and may have persuaded the Goehrs to move here.

Once settled, Laelia wanted to contribute to the war effort.

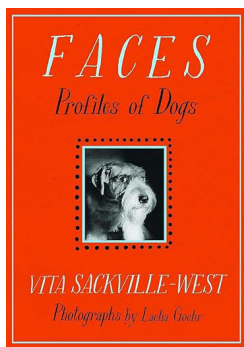
Renewing an earlier interest in photography, she became a volunteer for the YMCA Snapshots from Home League which enabled men and women on active duty to request photographs of their families and even pets. These were distributed to a network of volunteers who, at their own expense, visited the family, took the requested pictures and sent them on to the service personnel.

During the war, Laelia met the celebrated photographer Bill Brandt (1904-1983), with whom she took informal lessons before establishing a small studio in Amersham at Turret House, where her son attended prep-school. A mutual friend was the American artist and photojournalist Lee Miller (1907-1977).

Laelia's wide circle of friends and contacts helped establish a flourishing

career. Her black and white photographs of dogs famously illustrated *Faces: Profiles of Dogs* by Vita Sackville-West first published in 1961 and republished in 2019. She also published *Musicians in Camera* in 1987 with a foreword by Yehudi Menuhin. She is best known for these portraits of musicians and

her subjects included Stravinsky, Jacqueline du Pré and Count Basie. Perhaps because they combine both her passions, Laelia's musical portraits are dynamic and full of action. She also worked as a photojournalist



for The Picture Post, Lilliput, The Jewish Chronicle and The Observer, declining the offer of a staff job there as she wanted to follow her own interests.

Laelia took a wide range of photographs of people from all walks of life, ranging from photojournalist shots of poor children in the Gorbals to shots of Margot Fonteyn and Rudolph Nureyev at the Royal Ballet. Some of her most striking portraits were, however, taken in Amersham. These include amazing portraits of West Africans in traditional dress who we understand were business associates of the Kahan and Kirschner families who were timber merchants.

Laelia's close friend was Xenia Kahan, née Kirschner, who was also Russian, and lived at her parent's house, Whitehaven, Clifton Road. Her best friend was Lissy Gray, a Belgian countess. Lissy's husband, the Polish/Austrian composer Allan Gray (born Józef Żmigrod) (1902-1973) is best known for film scores such as *The African Queen* and *Emil and the Detectives*.

In 1951 Laelia travelled to Israel when Walter was booked to conduct

a series of concerts. Laelia used the trip to photograph Israeli politicians and leading intellectuals, and was also given permission to photograph the Yemeni Jewish population who had recently arrived in the country. Eighty of these photographs formed the first exhibition at the new Ben Uri Gallery in London in 1952. The Goehrs left Amersham in the 1950s, and after the breakup of their marriage, Laelia settled in Hampstead. She later married Henry Frankowski, an architect and gifted painter. Alexander 'Sandy' Goehr (1932-2024) went on to study composition at the Royal Manchester College of Music and, following in his father's footsteps, had a successful career as a composer and academic.

An Executive Producer at BBC Radio Music, Leo Black, later wrote about Francesco Ticciati's time in Amersham, but it could be argued that there is an element of truth for all of this creative emigre community: "for a man so besotted with England there could have been no more fortunate 'fall on his feet'; the town swarmed with culture".

Alison Bailey and Briony Hudson



The pharmacy at Blist's Hill Victorian Town Museum in Ironbridge

THE HISTORY OF THE PHARMACY SHOP

Never have I seen the Baptist Chapel so full as when Briony Hudson, the director of the Amersham Museum, came to talk about The History of the Pharmacy Shop in March. Every seat in the hall was taken! Briony undoubtedly has a huge in-depth knowledge of the subject. Before joining Amersham Museum in 2022, she, an apothecary herself, had worked in medical museums for 20 years starting as the manager of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society Museum Collection in 2002. Since then she published many books, curated a load of exhibitions and still serves in a committee role on various medical boards, colleges, schools of pharmacy and related health organisations.

It was amazing how the hour flew by as Briony explored the history of apothecaries and how they evolved into pharmacists. Also the way how she managed to weave together some Amersham stories with a broader pharmacy history, made the talk very special for our members.

But there was a parallel story in her talk, the struggle by apothecaries to establish professional respectability, to rid themselves of the stigma of profiteering over healing, tainted by trade and not being taken seriously by the educated science based practitioners. Their crime, they were selling products not associated with healing the sick as well as dispensing medicines!

Professional status was finally achieved with the passing of the Apothecaries Act in 1815.

Over two hundred years before the Act, the low status of the apothecary was illustrated by Shakespeare in this quote from *Romeo and Juliet* (1597):

*"In tatter'd weeds, with
overwhelming brows,
Culling of simples; meagre were his looks,
Sharp misery had worn him to the bones;
And in his needy shop a tortoise hung,
An alligator stuff'd, and other skins
Of ill-shaped fishes; and about his shelves
A beggarly account of empty boxes,
Green earthen pots, bladders
and musty seeds,
Remnants of packthread and
old cakes of roses"*



An Apothecary sitting in his shop, engraving ca.1750, Wallace Collection



*A Pharmacy, French oil painting c1700,
© Welcome Collection*

We then moved on to a picture of a shop with an impressive "morgan style" apothecary drawer known as a "drug run". I was taken aback by the use of this term (today referring to trips made to collect or distribute illegal drugs), but in the context of pharmacy history nothing more sinister than rows of polished mahogany drawers containing exotic quasi-remedies from around the world! There were also shelves holding wonderful porcelain jars, all designed to impress the customer and bring reassurance that this apothecary can be trusted.

Later on, glass jars and bottles replaced the porcelain jars. The Amersham Museum have three medical bottles that we were shown. One was green and ribbed, another blue and angular, the third was clear



The Dance of Death, the Apothecary, Thomas Rowlandson 1816, Wallace Collection

and had the name of the pharmacy and address embossed on the side. We were told that the colours were irrelevant. It was the texture and shape that were of importance to help the high proportion of illiterate citizens distinguish between poison and medication (for the full story of the glass bottles see “What’s the story behind the blue bottle” in Newsletter May 2024).

Briony moved us onto the 18th century to the well-known chemist John Bell, which opened at Oxford Circus in 1798, which subsequently moved to nearby Wigmore Street as John Bell and Croydon in 1912.

Then right up to the present day to the universally accepted Boots Pharmacy trading at 193 Oxford Street, selling lunchtime “meal deals” and nappies, alongside highly qualified pharmacists giving advice and dispensing medicines.

Pharmacies that are in retail situations sell all sorts of other products to be commercially viable. They become a chemist when they sell health products that are not medically prescribed. They also dispense drugs that are prescribed by doctors. The key point here is that they will have had a lengthy training and are registered, ensuring that the work they do and advice they give is safe.

Here in Old Amersham, we were shown photos of King’s Pharmacy at 6 Market Square (now Seasons Cafe) and Haddon’s Pharmacy at 38 High Street (now the cheese shop Gershon & Sons, where it’s good to see that they have retained the old mosaic entrance). Both followed the frowned upon old practice of combining commerciality with being a dispensing chemists, their success boosted by the development of the railway. Haddon’s obtained a full off-



Haddon's pharmacy advertising the huge range of merchandise it sold
© Amersham Museum

licence for wines and spirits and sold stationery and fancy goods along with local postcards produced from their own negatives. Optics were added and a London dentist came once weekly for extraction of teeth.

Today, there are four community pharmacies in Amersham, neatly representing the range of ways that pharmacy features in a modern town. There are two in Old Town – Hobbs Pharmacy within Rectory Meadows Surgery and Tesco Pharmacy inside the supermarket, and two on the hill – Boots and Collins & Jervie, both on Sycamore Road. But if you look at registered pharmacies, you find two more – one is in Amersham

Hospital on Whielden Street and the other has a registered address at 106 St Mary's Court, The Broadway. This is DoToR, an online pharmacy with a very different relationship with its customers (no in-person communication). So there is certainly continuity and change in the evolution of pharmacy. There were several questions afterward, such as when did they stop selling alcohol and arsenic? The former mayor of Amersham, Elizabeth Shepherd, made several very interesting points about pharmacists. Briony was brilliant, answering everything very effectively.

Peter Schweiger



Completion of the HS2 Ventilation Shaft Headhouse

Three years ago a sinkhole appeared in the field below Shardeloes House, triggered by “Florence”, one of the HS2 boring machines. The following year Keith Hoffmeister gave us an update on it and the progress of the tunnelling so far as it affected Amersham (see Newsletter May 2024 Editorial). Keith has been in touch again with these “before” and “after” images along with some background details.

A significant milestone was reached last December when construction of the vent shaft was completed and the site ‘handed over’ to HS2.

The shaft is located alongside Whielden Lane on what is effectively an island

surrounded by Whielden Lane, the A404 and the A413. The restricted space meant the office accommodation and car park had to be situated on the opposite side of Whielden Lane. The initial ‘enabling works’ started in 2020 and excavation of the shaft itself the following year. The hoardings surrounding the site were decorated with scenes depicting the history of Amersham and became a familiar part of the scenery.

Once the shaft was completed, a basement was excavated alongside and this will eventually house the electrical and mechanical plant including the ventilation fans themselves. The tunnel



boring machines digging the Chiltern Tunnel passed under the shaft in February 2023.

Sitting on top of the shaft is the headhouse. The original design for this was controversial to say the least. Following a consultation process, a revised design with a lower height and the removal of aluminium fins on the top was approved by Buckinghamshire Council. Plans to illuminate it at night were also dropped. The restricted size of the site and its situation meant that the headhouse had to be round. Now that it is finished, it has to be admitted that it fits in quite well.

A feature of the site is the 200-metre-long boundary wall. This is lined with flint panels reflecting the use of flint in many of the local buildings. There is further use of gabions (steel baskets) filled with flint as a retaining wall. It has been hoped to use local flint from the spoil excavated from the shaft. Alas there were insufficient quantities and the flint came from a quarry in Norfolk. As it is from the same geological formation it is essentially 'local' stone. The panels were made in Northern Ireland.

The only other constructions visible on the surface are the plenum (basically

the vent outlet) and two access hatches to the basement.

Landscaping and planting continue. Native plants and seeds have been used to create habitats and to enhance the biodiversity value of the site. Habitats will include reptile egg laying heaps and a reptile and invertebrate basking bank. HS2 have also undertaken long-term management of the site guided by a Habitat Management Plan for the lifespan of the railway.

Installation of the mechanical and electrical plant will get under way later in the year. Rail systems will be installed at an undisclosed time in the future. At the moment it is not known when services will start but it will be beyond 2033 and then only far as Old Oak Common. It is not known when services will reach Euston.

You can see more details by visiting the HS2 Photo Diary on the Chiltern Society website

This shows the impact at a number of locations across both the Chilterns and the Colne Valley Regional Park and is constantly updated. There are also links to various videos including a virtual fly through along the route from Denham to Calvert beyond Aylesbury.

Keith Hoffmeister

Battery Energy Storage System at Mop End

Planning application refused

An application by Sandbrook Capital BES Ltd to install a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) facility with a total number of 84 units, together with associated hard and soft landscaping, was submitted to Buckinghamshire Council in August 2025. The proposed development would be encircled by a security fence measuring 2.4m high and accompanied by motion sensitive lighting, beyond which a soft landscaping scheme would be implemented. This includes a biodiversity site situated immediately to the south of the proposed BESS compound, spanning a total of 22 acres and composed of woodland, ponds and meadows. Following a period of 40 years, the site is proposed to be decommissioned, and the plot restored to agricultural land – as accomplished by the removal of all built form and hard surfacing. It is an area of pleasant countryside enjoyed by ramblers and dog walkers with the site extending over two Rights of Way, one clearly visible on the picture cutting across the lower field.

The Amersham Society was one of the over 500 “comments” sent to the Council. In it we highlighted 10 areas as to why the application should be rejected, including:

Noise pollution – the constant low frequency hum from the air



conditioning units required to cool the batteries will be a source of continued disruption to human and animal alike and destroy the area's tranquil rural atmosphere.

Access – proposed access to the site utilising Mop End Lane is unsuitable for large vehicles during construction and for the regular use of large lorries thereafter.

Soil and water contamination – there is a very real risk with potential contaminants entering the nearby water courses, not to mention the effects on local wildlife.

Harm to the registered parkland – a point which the Council used in their rejection, that whilst the registered parkland of Shardeloes extends up

to, but does not include the Mop End farmhouse, the site is sufficiently close to the parkland to have a considerable effect from the noise, fire risk and light especially at night.

We were delighted that the application was turned down in March as it would “constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt, would result in harm to the openness of the Green Belt in both spatial and visual terms, and would conflict with three of the purposes of including land within the Green Belt. Substantial weight is given to the harm to the Green Belt. Other harm has been identified to the character and appearance of the site, National Landscape and the local surroundings; the development would result in poor design, harm to the setting of the Grade II* Listed Shardeloes Park, harm to below ground heritage and there is insufficient information on impact to protected species”.

Construction of Lidl’s discount food store on King George V road

Amersham Town Council are recommending refusal

The saga of how Lidl came to own the land on the site of the old Council Offices was outlined in January’s newsletter.

Lidl submitted an application to build a discount food store and associated car parking on 24th September 2025, this was followed 5 weeks later by an application to demolish the unused Council Offices. So what’s happening now? Planning approval was not required for the demolition and it is clear that preparatory work to do so is now underway.

However no decision has been made on the construction of the food store itself. Last November Amersham Town Council recommended to Buckinghamshire Council that they refuse the planning application, this followed a survey they conducted in September where 551 residents took part. A date for this and other comments to be debated by the Planning Committee has yet to be made known.

Some of the grounds for refusing the application are:

Access and parking – particularly concerned that the planned HGV turning area is close to the entrance to the store and the parent and toddler parking bays. Insufficient weight has been given to the number of commuters, school children and infants who will be using Chiltern Avenue, Chiltern Lifestyle Centre and the cut through across King George V Fields.

Impact on neighbouring properties – specifically the risk of light pollution due to extended opening hours, noise pollution including from out of hours HGV deliveries. These issues

are made more acute by the fact that there is sheltered housing for older people next to the site. In their survey 72.68% strongly disagreed or disagreed with Lidl's claim that the store would have limited impact on nearby residential areas. Issues raised included increased traffic, noise pollution and pedestrian safety concerns, particularly for children and older residents.

Use of site – the Local Plan and core strategy (townscape study 2011 and numerous other policy documents) allocate this site as a site for employment which does not include retail. Therefore, the presumption in favour of business, storage or distribution business use is in play in this application and Lidl would need to show that there is a need for another food store. We do not believe this to be true because by the time Lidl opens on this site there will be an Aldi, Tesco, Marks and Spencer's Food, Little Waitrose and Tesco Express all within walking distance of the site (see Newsletter January 2026, page 39). Therefore, there is no justification for retail outside the core retail area. Previously this site was capable of supporting hundreds of jobs and yet Lidl's plans only account for 40 employed roles on this site and therefore this development also represents a loss of potential local employment opportunities. We also note that there is no evidence that Lidl have marketed the site as an office space and therefore they cannot assert that a change of use for this site is needed.

The submission to the Council by Amersham Town Council ends ominously: "We would also like to note that this application was all the more difficult to analyse due to the lack of portal access to key documents on the Buckinghamshire Council Planning Portal".



A replacement Foodhall?

M&S's plans for White Lion Road

To quote the website <https://amershammands.co.uk/the-proposals> "Marks & Spencer is bringing forward plans for a new, purpose-built M&S Foodhall on land at White Lion Road, Amersham". Do have a look at it, but I'm afraid by the time you do read it, their drop-in public consultation at the King's Church, Raans Road will have passed – it was on the 29th April.

John Catton

Noticeboard

Programme of Talks and Events for 2026

Talks are held in the Kings Chapel, 30 High Street, Old Amersham.
(Note: The May talk will be in Lifestyle Centre, Amersham-on-the-Hill)
Coffee, tea and biscuits served from 7:30pm, with talks starting at 8:00pm.

Thursday 7th May

The Exile of King Louis XVIII in Hartwell House

A talk by Neil Rees

*(To be held in Drake Hall, Lifestyle Centre,
Amersham-on-the-Hill)*

Monday 28th September

Life & death in a Roman Villa

A talk by Jill Eyers

Monday 26th October

AGM and talk

*We will be joined by a speaker from the charity
Wycombe Homeless Connection*

Monday 16th November

Benjamin Robertshaw

*A reading from the autobiography of the
18th century rector of Amersham by Andrew Piper*

*This is an additional event to our original calendar
and will be held in St. Mary's church
Full details in September's newsletter*

Monday 30th November

Ruth Ellis... The Last Lady

A talk by Jeff Rozelaar

Website: www.amershamsociety.org

General Enquiries: please email info@amershamsociety.org