

SOPWELL

RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

making Sopwell a better place



AGM 10th May 2016

Our Annual General meeting will be held on Tuesday 10th May 2016 starting at 7.30pm. PUT THIS DATE IN YOUR DIARY NOW. We will be in Mandeville School again but this time we have been promised chairs big enough for adult bums! We are hoping to have a speaker from the Civic Society.

If you value your association, please come along and support us. If you don't, there is a real danger that we will cease to exist. Most of the committee are elderly and we are dwindling every year. I have managed to break both my legs over the past two years and still no one comes forward to take over the Secretary role. What more do I have to do to show that enough is enough? We really do need more, preferably younger, people to help and take the association forward.

Sandy Norman

What a Load of Rubbish—see page 2 for details



Sopwell Nunnery Open Space

The river

A lot of work has been taking place on both sides of the river. In January work started to remove trees, mostly willow, which have cast too much shade over the river. A large half of the nearby hedgerow was also coppiced leaving the smaller half for laying. Countryside Management Services (CMS) volunteers began laying the hedgerow in February. In March work will begin on the construction of three dog steps in the river. These will be purpose built access points for the dogs who love to have a swim each day. Dog owners should encourage their pets to use these rather than allow them to continue to erode the riverbank by using their own methods of getting in the river. This construction work will be undertaken by CMS volunteers.

The ruins

You may have noticed that last year it was reported by the Herts Advertiser that the ruins were now on the "at risk" register. Because of this the Council is allowed to apply to Historic England for a grant to repair them. They have received a grant and repairs are due to begin later this year.

From Your Editor

Welcome to our 29th edition of the Sopwell Newsletter and may I take this opportunity to say how much we are indebted to Sandy Norman and her continuing hard work for Sopwell Residents. Alas, Sandy and Len will be moving soon and although she will be still living in St Albans, she will not effectively be a Sopwell resident and her post as Secretary will be vacant. Please, please, the Committee needs new blood, otherwise it will shrivel and die and all her good work will be undone. We will try our best to keep going but we desperately need new members to bring in new ideas and the energy to spur us all on and achieve more great things for Sopwell and for Sandy's legacy. Rant over.

Editor, Barry Bateman

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Sopwell Memories

Back in May last year, I interviewed **Denis Mardel** who gave me lots of interesting memories about Sopwell before the estates were built. These have now been transcribed and edited and uploaded to the website. If you haven't looked already do go and listen to him.

There are probably only a handful of people alive today who can remember that the river by New Barnes Mill was once called the **Tar**. While I was doing research for the book: *Sopwell, a history and collection of memories*, I came across several references to and collected memories from people who remembered the Tar river. Why it was called that remained a puzzle until now. As a child, Denis Mardel was curious and asked this question. The answer given was obvious – because it was tardy! That part of the river was slow running compared to the mill stream. It makes sense now. Have a listen to his explanation. He also had fascinating memories about his relations in **Flint cottages** and what this area was like 80 years ago before the estates were built up.

Another recent post you may find interesting is about the **Cottonmill Men's Club**. I was sent some old photos of members of this club who used to meet in Mandeville School in the 1950s and 1960s. Let me know if you can put more names to faces.

It has been suggested to me that there may be some good memories from people around here who worked in some of the **aircraft companies**: de Havilland, Handley Page for example. Has anyone any memories or know of others who used to work there? Please let me know.

Also, apart from John Buckingham who gave me a vivid memory, does anyone else remember the digging out of the hill and levelling **the gasworks site**? Does anyone remember the Drinkwater lorries? Again please get in touch.

The website: www.sopwellmemories.org.uk will continue to grow but I need your memories!

Sandy Norman

Clean for the Queen



Well we cleaned for the Queen. Hope she appreciated that about 20 Sopwell residents including children turned out on Mothers' Day and in the cold picked 30 bags of litter and recyclables plus an assortment of fly tipped junk. We could have done more but we were 'hailed' off.

Sandy Norman

In the photograph are a few of the volunteers who ventured out to help Clean for the Queen and of course for Sopwell itself and let us not forget the unsung heroes of Sopwell that litter pick on a daily basis to help keep our patch a cleaner and healthier environment.

Editor

Sopwell Secrets - 4th May, 2.00pm

Guided Walk

A leafy stroll through Sopwell's green spaces and hidden alleys. A fairly easy walk with mixed terrain and some slopes. One flight of stairs and a visit to a play/nature area. May not be suitable for very small children.

Meet: Benches overlooking Sopwell Nunnery Ruins on Cottonmill Lane, St Albans AL1 2BY

Distance: 3 miles

Organiser: Maggy Douglas

Booking: No booking required

There is very limited parking in Cottonmill Lane.

Alternatively, park in Homebase carpark for free in Griffiths Way and walk over the railway crossing, turn left into Cottonmill Lane and continue until you come to the Ruins.

Walk will be repeated on Sunday 22nd May



A Story From Our Past part 2

You may remember in last spring's edition of our newsletter, I wrote about the tragic story of the Dorling family who lived in Longmire Road (now Riverside Road) and I promised I would include more about their sad story in a future edition of the newsletter. I am reprinting the story so far so that you can familiarise yourselves once again with the Dorling tragedy

Frederick Dorling, who was widowed before the outbreak of war and left with seven children, married his next door neighbour, Nora, also a widow, with two children, in 1914. He was exempt from combatant duties but he served as a private in the Hertfordshire Royal Army Medical Corps in a voluntary capacity. The tragic events start literally just a week or so before the end of the war. Frederick died from influenza a few days after assisting to receive a convoy of wounded men at Napsbury Hospital and within a few more days after his death his daughter also died. Although there were representatives from the RAMC and floral tributes sent by his employers Messrs E. Lee and Sons Ltd and the Red Cross, Frederick and his daughter were buried together in a communal grave with six other people, with no headstone or marker to commemorate their final resting place. Furthermore, this left Frederick's poor wife Nora widowed now for the fourth time.

Nora carried on as best she could for the next few years but sadly passed away in 1921, leaving nine children. Admittedly, some of them were by now adults but nevertheless from what I understand, Grace Dorling, aged 15, tried to look after the family. But without any financial support, the authorities were called in and Grace was sent to the North of England and placed in service, while two of her younger siblings were taken to the workhouse at first and then after six months put into the National Children's Home in Harpenden. If this wasn't bad enough, when the youngest of the siblings, Bertie, who was by now 21 left the Home, he was told that, apart from his brother (also at the Orphanage), he had no other family because they had all died during the war. This poor man had lost his mother and his father and apart from his step brother he had no other living relatives; or so he believed, until by chance he received a letter, in the 1980's, from a young woman who was researching her surname, Dorling, (no relation) and asking whether he had any information. He was able to say that apart from his own children, he had no other living relatives. Subsequently, this lady wrote back and said she had indeed found a living relative of his and in fact it was his step sister, Grace, who was a widow and living in London. You can imagine how emotional the reunion was when they finally met. Grace was able to tell him that she tried to find out what had happened to him but it proved to be impossible due to the

impenetrable nature of officialdom at that time. She also told him that six other siblings had been alive during the intervening years but sadly they were now dead. It was a bitter sweet moment for Bertie. He had at least found his step sister, which brought him great happiness but the thought that he had had more family alive for most of his life without him knowing, deeply saddened him. He never had the chance to experience the joy that having brothers and sisters could have brought him.

Bertie's own story during those intervening years was also eventful and not without sadness and hardship. Like many young men he joined the Army at the start of the Second World War, leaving his wife, Vera, whom he had married in 1939. In 1942 he was captured by the Japanese at the fall of Singapore and spent nearly four years on the infamous Burma Death Railway. Unlike so many of his fellow captives, he survived and was able to return to Great Britain and to his loving wife Vera, where they continued in blissful happiness until Vera's untimely death in 1971.

I am indebted to Bertie's son David for all this information about his family and although I only met him once. I was struck by his kindness, humanity and vitality and I like to think I had a glimpse of what it would have been like to have met his dear father, who had suffered so much.

Barry Bateman

Wassailing—an ancient tradition



This wonderful event was put on by the Watercress Wildlife Association in January and held, of course, in their magnificent site, very close to Longmire Road (Riverside Rd)

Railway Celebrations



Last October this fine Victorian flint and brick station, once the stationmaster's home and terminus of the former Hatfield to St Albans Great Northern railway branch line reached its 150th anniversary – having opened in 1865 the route then reopened in 1985 as the Alban Way. In celebrating the occasion and the line's new lease of life as a cycle/pedestrian path, cyclists were, on Sunday 18th able to follow a specially devised five mile *Railway to Cycleway* trail sponsored by the Great Northern pub.

Through a series of photos, letters and press-cuttings, displayed along the St Albans' section of the Alban Way, the *Railway to Cycleway* trail told the story of how the once disused railway line was saved from the County's road builders back in the 80s and transformed into an attractive cycle friendly route between the two towns.

In the afternoon there was an opportunity to re discover the historic locations of some of the former London Road station's buildings and

features. With the help of a 1867 plan of the station's goods yard, a Google aerial view of Orient Close and a sheet of tracing paper, it was possible with a bit of skillful tracing, to draw in the course of the railway lines through Orient Close as well as pin-pointing the location of the engine shed, turntable and cattle pen. It had been hoped that we would be able to chalk in the outline of some of these features for others to see but a lack of time prevented us achieving this.

If Lord Ebury, Chairman of the 1865 Hatfield and St Albans Railway Company had been alive to attend Sunday's double celebration, he would have been impressed by the carnival like atmosphere of the day. He would, also have been amused to learn that the station's former Ladies' Waiting Room was now part of a children's nursery, and the expression/term "travelling under one's own steam", has nothing to do with the steam engines that once rumbled long this track one hundred and fifty years ago!

Peter Wares

Community Cafe

The community café at St Julian's is open every Thursday from 10am until 3pm for teas, coffees and homemade cake and from 11am – 2pm for light lunches. For lunch you can choose between a bowl of lovely homemade soup and a roll, a baked potato with a choice of toppings, a bacon bap or a toasted sandwich. The food and drinks are very reasonably priced. All profits made are passed on to the community.

It is a real Internet café in a very friendly atmosphere. Wi-Fi connected computers are onsite and available for use free of charge while you are there. Why not come along to see?

Next Edition

The next edition will be out next Autumn. If you have any items for inclusion or you wish to advertise, please go to the website and leave a message. Advertisement charges: £50 for half a page and £25 for a quarter page.

If you live in Sopwell, you are automatically a member of SRA. There is no charge to join and events are free.

Sopwell Ruins



Useful Contacts

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Faulty road or pavement surface: 01438 737320 or
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