



Spring News 2024 Founded in 1930

REVEALED...The Winners of the Harpenden Society AWARDS 2023

After a two year absence the Society has decided to expand the number of Awards this time round. There were a number of very worthy nominations across a diverse category of developments and buildings.

Two prestigious Plaques

- The affordable homes development at Roan Place.
- The new apartment block in Station Approach.



A Letter of Commendation

The new house in Moreton End Lane



Three framed Certificates of Merit



- The new all weather pitch and ground development in Rothamsted Park.
- The extended Silver Plate Delicatessen in Vaughan Road
- The upstairs development of the new Dahlish Ice Cream parlour



Presentations of the Awards will be announced soon and featured subsequently on the Society web site and local media. See our web site for details. A big thank you for all the nominations with a reminder to start thinking about your favourites for 2024.



Recent warm weather has brought an air of 'Spring Fever' to the High Street with spring bulbs in flower and some changes to retail premises having taken place. Specsavers opened their 1,000th store on April 8 AND in the hospitality stakes a new Beer and Burger bar - SEAR - will be opening at the end of May in Station Rd to join The Burger Box in Southdown.



Nail Bars with beauty support are also in the ascendency with Krystal's Nails having opened in Southdown and the old 20/20 EyeCare optician in Station road also opening as part of the adjacent beauty/hair salon Tropical Salon with a new nail bar.



The basic structure of retailing is changing with Pharmacies providing more initial consultations to assist the NHS shortfall in GP services. SNIPS in Leyton Road has now become the Hertfordshire Centre for Dentistry. The PopUp shop in Leyton Rd continues to attract a selection of retailers from menswear, footwear and ladies wear in the last 3 months. PLUS Charity Shops continuing to offer an amazing range of quality products.



And in terms of a Banking Hub, Harpenden's application remains in doubt with the promise of Nationwide Building Society to remain in Harpenden until Spring 2028.

At the time of going to press the Society are eagerly awaiting news of potential changes to the parking arrangements within the Town's street locations and general car parks.

Compared to many High Streets across the country Harpenden has retained its apparent status as a thriving centre. It can only stay this way if Harpenden residents make an even bigger effort to SHOP LOCAL.

Tribute. DONALD ROBERTSON

One of the most long-standing and respected members of the Harpenden Society, Donald Robertson, passed away in April, aged 89. He served on the Society Committee for many years, where he was responsible in particular for our important watching brief on transport issues affecting the town.

He was also a key member of the dedicated team of Society newsletter distributors, charged with the vital job, every three months, of collating the bundles of newsletters and getting them out to the final letterbox deliverers who, it should be added, always welcomed his cheery arrival.

Donald was well known in Harpenden for his, and his late wife Gillian's, membership of the local Quaker community, based at the Friends' Meeting House in Southdown Road. He represented the Quakers in the town's 'Churches Together' movement and was active in setting up the local Credit Union branch, providing financial assistance to less fortunate townsfolk, as well as more down-to-earth help at St Albans' 'Open Door' charity for the needy and sometimes hungry. In recent years his earlier professional experience in financial matters was put to good use as treasurer of another philanthropic local organisation, Harpenden Helping Hand.

Born in India, where his father was in the army as part of the British Raj prior to partition in 1947, Donald with his family moved to England, settling in Devon where he went to school and was a member of the Teignmouth Sea Scout troop.

After leaving school at sixteen he enrolled in the Merchant Navy, in due course rising through the ranks to become second mate on the original Queen Elizabeth liner. In 1956 he married Gillian for what would be a happy 67-year marriage. Though he had been baptized in India as a Church of Scotland adherent, he then joined the Quakers where Gillian was already a member.



Back on dry land, in around 1963, Donald became something of a pioneer in the use of information technology through a job with the J Lyons offshoot LEO Computers. His experience there led him to apply for a management post with the prestigious Fenwicks department store, based initially at its Newcastle-upon-Tyne headquarters, but subsequently becoming project manager for the company's large new north London store at Brent Cross, which meant a move south.

The family duly moved, in 1974, to a house in Westfield Avenue, Harpenden, from where Donald commuted into London, in due course after leaving Fenwicks, being appointed chief finance officer for the UK Quaker movement, based at the Society of Friends' headquarters in Euston Road.

After their son and two daughters had 'flown the nest', Gillian and Donald downsized to a house in Lodge Gardens on the newly-built Lydekker Estate where, in retirement, Donald became active in the 'Friends of Lydekker Park' local residents association, which maintains a watching brief on that highly-prized green space close to the centre of Harpenden.

That Special Occasion Store

It is over 40 years since Harpenden's own traditional department store, Anscombes in Leyton Road, closed its doors for the last time, to make way for Waitrose. It is remembered by many, and not only for its wondrous Lamson overhead 'zip wire' cash handling system which, in the era before credit cards, helped expedite customers' purchasing transactions. More essentially it was the go-to shop for a whole host of merchandise, notably a wide range of haberdashery.

What can be justly regarded as Anscombes' 21st Century counterpart, with a justifiable claim to be Harpenden's own specialist department store, is Threads, haberdashery being just one of a whole host of essential offerings. Prominently sited in the busy Station Road end of Lower High Street, it draws in many shoppers typically attracted, close to the entrance door, by its huge selection of greetings cards, many of them uniquely hand designed and priced accordingly.



Lara Wares has overseen the growth of Threads over two decades

Threads is owned by Lara Wares and her husband Rodger and was first established in the year 2000 as a much smaller shop behind Barclays Bank, now occupied by Stephanie Randall Flowers. But it moved some 21 years ago to the more spacious premises at no 7 Lower High Street, replacing what had been since 1964 the Harpenden branch of Sketchley Dry Cleaners.

Coinciding with a renewal of its lease, Threads recently underwent a major upgrade/refurbishment. It involved closing the shop for several weeks while the work was carried out which, says Lara, was unfortunate but customers will undoubtedly have appreciated what was something of a transformation for what is now an extensive 1800 sq ft floor area. New air-conditioning was installed as well as more energy efficient and brighter LCD lighting and a smarter more durable and level wooden floor.

Greetings cards might be thought of first by would-be Threads customers – as many as two hundred are sometimes sold in a day. Then the obviously associated 'special occasion' related giftware would come close behind. People, not surprisingly, quite often come in for 'last minute' gifts, for which a bewildering wide choice is on display, ranging from costume jewellery and glassware to



handbags, fancy toiletries and novelty, sometimes quirky, items such as the Harpenden-themed coffee mug featured on the back page of our Winter newsletter.

Decorative candles, scented or otherwise, are in steady demand says Lara, alongside atmosphere-enhancing 'reed diffusers', and selected items of kitchenware, serviettes and, complementing the greeting cards, matching attractive stationery.

Though lady customers probably outnumber menfolk browsing Threads' displays, there is nevertheless a clearly-defined men's section where such specialised items as cufflinks and jokey items of apparel, notably socks, are ready to catch the eye of the impulse buyer!

Fathers as well as mothers are also likely to be dragged into Threads, willingly or otherwise, by their kids, enticed by the boldly signposted 'PARTY ROOM', where balloons and other decorations necessarily occupy much of the space as well importantly as toys, where educational toys figure prominently .

Meanwhile traditional haberdashery customers are catered for by a large selection of buttons, wool and – appropriately, for the name of the shop – several hundred different coloured sewing threads. Recent decades have seen an ever greater reliance, in a host of not always obvious applications, of Velcro; and Threads is the place to go for numerous grades of what has become an essential bonding device across a range of industries. 'We've even had builders coming in for heavier-duty Velcro', says Lara.



She goes on to point out that by no means all of Threads' offerings are on open display in the ground floor sales area. Basement and first floor storage augments the stock available to meet customers' not-always-straightforward needs or expectations.

Much of Threads' success in today's challenging retail environment is undoubtedly attributable to its helpful and friendly staff, three of whom have become familiar faces over the course of about twenty years. And following the recent lease renewal the business looks set to be attracting Harpenden clientele for a few more decades!



Bloody legend

Blood from the one-time abattoir behind Dunkley's butcher's shop, on the Lower High Street site now occupied by Threads, was in years gone by allegedly poured around the base of the now massive horse chestnut tree on the green in front of the parade. 'Village legend' has it, furthermore, that the gory 'irrigation' stimulated the tree each Spring to come into leaf and then into blossom noticeably earlier than other horse chestnuts in the vicinity. Whether apocryphal or otherwise, it is clear from the tree's tremendous size and evidently robust state of health today that it suffered no significant harm in its younger life.



A fresh new look for our logo and graphics

Our active logo and graphic design is now ten years old and looking rather dated. The Committee thought it was time for a change, resulting in a whole new concept, colour scheme, website, banners and templates.

Julie Maginn, a well known local artist was briefed to design a fresh and contemporary concept to reflect our role in reaching out to the residents of Harpenden to highlight issues of common concern, and work with authorities to develop solutions which enhance the quality of life in Harpenden. As you can see below the concept is totally different.

The new concept will be introduced from the end of May onwards across all our media including the Website, the Newsletter, Posters and Display banners.

We hope you like it and we are confident that it will help the Society grow in both size and stature in the years ahead.



Will Climate Change affect the future of your food?...



How sustainable farming will feed the world.



How Healthy Eating will keep you fit and well.

James Clarke from Rothamsted Research and Katharine Tate, Harpenden's Food Teacher will explain what the future has in store.

Public Meeting organised by The Harpenden Society including a brief Society AGM 7.30 pm Thursday May 16
Katherine Warrington School
Reserve your seat on www.harpendensociety.org
FREE PARKING
reg. Charity No. 27854



Beating those ambulance delays

Harpenden gets its own 'Community First Responders'

How long should one have to wait for an ambulance to arrive in response to an emergency 999 call? It could be said that the answer has always been 'too long', while nevertheless appreciating the logistical challenges, not least of 21st Century road traffic. And in recent times of course, due to the widely acknowledged pressures on the NHS, and the ambulance service in particular, average waiting times have regrettably lengthened.



**Ready to respond: (left to right)
Monica, Vivienne and Neil**

In many parts of the country, prolonged ambulance waiting times are a lot worse than in the Harpenden area. But any delays, for whatever reason, in dealing with medical – sometimes life-threatening – emergencies are unwelcome. And in a concerted effort to address the issue locally, a volunteer group, under the governance of the East of England Ambulance Service, has now been formed; they are the Community First Responders (CFRs).

Initially three in number covering Harpenden they most importantly have the vital resuscitation skills of full-time ambulance crews, with the expertise to deal rapidly and efficiently with such critical issues as cardiac arrest, strokes, epileptic fits and loss of consciousness, as well as less specific emergencies – chest pain for example.

Now, when a 999 emergency call is made by someone in Harpenden, either from home or on a mobile in the town, the established Paramedic Ambulance Service dispatcher contacts the CFR and the ambulance team simultaneously. Experience to date has shown that in many instances the CFR can get there more quickly.

Depending on the location and the seriousness of the patient's condition, the CFR can also support the on-site ambulance team when they arrive or, after assessing the situation, recommend standing down the en-route ambulance, as urgent care and transfer to hospital are not needed.

Research has shown that the survival rate after cardiac arrest reduces by 10% for every minute that passes

without life-saving intervention. The CFRs' role is therefore a crucial one; their timely response can make a significant difference between life and death. Harpenden's three CFR volunteers, Neil, Vivienne and Monica, are on call, in shifts, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year (366 days this year!). Their operations are co-ordinated, via direct radio communication, by the East of England Ambulance Service Trust (EEAST).

Harpenden's CFRs are already attending 30 to 40 calls a month. They are equipped with full resuscitation equipment, including an automatic defibrillator, a 'vital signs' observation monitoring kit, and an oxygen delivery system. They are able to provide EEAST ambulance control with timely updates and raise alerts if the patient's condition deteriorates.

They are also registered on the GoodSam app which automatically alerts them via their personal mobile phones to cardiac arrests in the area, allowing them to respond even, if necessary, when they're not on call.

Most CFR schemes in the UK are funded through ambulance service budgets and community donations. The newly established CFR team in Harpenden is currently using equipment on loan from their St Albans counterparts, which was established in 2017, since when it has raised voluntary donation funding to buy seven kits.



For the new Harpenden team to become fully self sufficient, some £10,000 needs to be raised this year to pay for the acquisition and ongoing operational support of two more kits, enabling all three Harpenden CFRs to volunteer simultaneously, should for example a major local emergency arise.

The Harpenden Society is strongly supporting the new potentially life-saving CFR incentive, which it will be promoting via projected public meetings and other events. As this newsletter went to press, close to £8000 had been contributed towards the £10,000 target set for what has now become a registered charity. Further donations can be made to what is an unquestionably worthwhile initiative, via its website: <https://www.justgiving.com/page/harpenden-cfrs-2024>.

Museum opening a resounding success

Incontrovertible evidence of the interest of the people of Harpenden in local history came at the official opening in April of the long-awaited Harpenden Museum hosted by its custodian Harpenden Local History Society. Over 1100 visitors attended what was a hugely successful Local History Day at the Eric Morecambe Centre, in addition to a hundred or so marshals and others manning the stands of numerous supporting local organisations including the Harpenden Society in the spacious main EMC auditorium. Among them were other local history groups from St Albans, Redbourn and Wheathampstead as well as Rothamsted Research.



The formal museum opening ceremony was undertaken by the newly-appointed High Sheriff Of Hertfordshire Annie Brewster, supported by the current Harpenden Town Mayor Cllr Fiona Gaskell. Both expressed the hope that the day's event and the now established museum would kindle a new interest in the town's heritage, especially among the younger generation locally, a number of whom took part in a specially-organised competition.



As well as the main, essentially permanent, exhibits in the museum itself, visitors were able to look at a large collection of historical photographs and maps mounted on display boards in one of the EMC's larger meeting rooms.

Cllr Gaskell offered her 'warmest congratulations to the team who worked so hard on the event, and I look forward to seeing and hearing a lot more of the Local History Society in future'.



Following its official opening, the new museum is scheduled to be open to the public from 11am to 3pm every Saturday and on as many Tuesdays and Thursdays for which volunteer stewards are available.



After the successful open day, Local History Society chairman Roger Butterworth said 'we put on this event to relaunch the Society, now we have our museum, to educate the public on our local history and to make a contribution to the cultural life of Harpenden', adding that 'we also aimed to significantly increase membership, which was wonderfully achieved – the event boosted our membership increase by 50%!'.

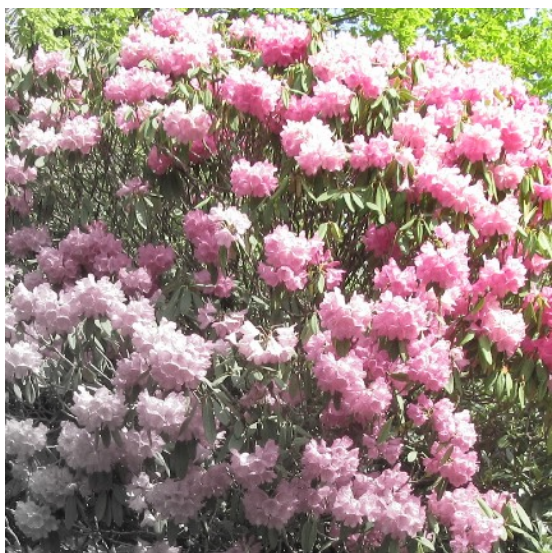
EDITOR'S VIEW

Alan Bunting

Floral extravaganza

As the more green-fingered readers of this newsletter obviously know, the azalea is an ericaceous plant, a genus – as my dictionary further informs me – ‘close akin to, or subgenus of, the rhododendron, with five stamens and leathery annual leaves and large zygomorphic flowers’.

Detailed horticultural knowledge is not required however, after one of the wettest Winters on record, for an appreciation of what is such wonderful evidence of Spring and arguably at its most beautiful and prolific locally along the entrance drive of the Childwickbury estate. Coming into full bloom at the beginning of May, they inevitably draw attention away from the nearby bluebells which have started to fade from their own floral glory.



I leave it to others to differentiate between the rhododendrons and the azaleas in the accompanying Childwickbury pictures, though the variety of colours through white to pink to purple only adds to the attraction of what, at other times of the year, might be dismissed as mere ‘shrubs’.

ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER

We receive regular plaudits from Harpenden Society members telling us how much they look forward to the quarterly arrival of our newsletter. Many say it has become their primary source of news of what’s happening in our town. Over the last eight years or so, under Alan Bunting’s editorship, it has broadened its coverage to include not only hard (often exclusive) news but also in-depth features about local enterprises – their history as well as their vital place in Harpenden’s commercial life. The size of the newsletter has increased accordingly, from six to eight and then to twelve pages.

But there are inevitable constraints on the newsletter’s future, not least Alan’s advancing age

and consequent wish to ease the workload involved. He emphasises however that the main challenge is not the writing but gathering the ‘source material’, that is identifying and researching potential stories. All of which is effectively an appeal for what might be termed ‘editorial support’ from someone, perhaps – though not necessarily – with journalistic aspirations, who would like to help maintain the newsletter’s role as the ‘flagship’ of the Harpenden Society.

Interested, but want to know more about the ‘job description’?

**If so please contact Alan on editor@harpendensociety.org or myself on chairman@harpendensociety.org
Jeff Phillips Chairman, Harpenden Society.**

Please send comments on articles or any other issues raised in this edition to the editor: Alan Bunting
editor@harpendensociety.org. Sub-editor Harry Downie
Visit the Society’s website – www.harpendensociety.org

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