
POTTERS BAR HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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Our first issue was published rather hurriedly to meet a deadline with the result that our presentation was not at all what we would have wished. In spite of this it appears that it was fairly well received. We trust that our second issue will prove to be more acceptable in appearance and of greater interest in subject matter. We would, however, remind our readers that the continued success of any journal is dependant on a regular supply of suitable contributions and a lively correspondence.

Members and other readers are invited to contribute articles for publication in future issues. Manuscripts, letters and other items should be sent to the editor.

Dr. Frederick Brittain, Litt.D.

In the death of Dr. Brittain on March 15th. 1969, the Society lost its most eminent Vice-President, South Mimms its most distinguished son and historian, and Jesus College, Cambridge, an officer and savant of wide fame. For a man so remarkable in many fields no adequate tribute can be paid here: for that, one may turn to the ample obituary in the "Potters Bar Press", written by one who knew him intimately, and the long report of his funeral at St. Giles at which Mr and Mrs Davis represented the Society in a congregation that completely filled the church he loved and served so long.

It is given to few men to achieve more than the success of a normal academic career, with a long succession of College offices and many books on subjects as diverse as Latin Literature, History, Acting and Rowing to his credit - more because to South Mimms, Dr. Brittain was also "Freddy", a beloved character who kept open house there, whose friends came from all ages and walks of life, who delighted in a joke and found the utmost joy in living his Christian faith and worshipping at his village church. He chronicled the village he loved so well in several scholarly books which bore his learning lightly, and even when afflicted by constant ill health he eagerly and patiently took a very large part in getting "The Story of Potters Bar and South Mimms" produced - a work which was not intended to supplant his own masterly "South Mimms" of 1931. That book is perhaps his best and lasting written memorial, for it reveals his own deep humanity.

K.R.D.

DISAPPEARING LANDMARKS.

The face of Potters Bar continues to change at a rapid rate, and seldom for the better. Two years ago the Ritz Cinema was pulled down to make way for a Tesco Supermarket, and it can at least be said that this pleasant modern building is not aesthetically inferior to the cinema style of the 1950's.

Very recently, however, there disappeared two irreplaceable landmarks which were older and more integral features of our local history. One, demolished at the end of August, was "The Gables" in Darkes Lane, at the corner of the Avenue, which had the distinction of being the only private house in the district to be mentioned in Sir Nikolaus Pevsner's Middlesex volume in "The Buildings of England" series. It is not difficult to guess that half-a-dozen houses of no architectural interest will be crammed in to occupy this valuable site. Modern society, at least in Potters Bar, seems to attach no value to such visual amenities of the whole community as grace and spaciousness, dignity and restfulness.

In September a more notable building vanished: old St. John's Church in the High Street, built in 1828 as Potters Bar's first parish church and replaced by St. Mary's in 1915. Derelict for many years and with weathering of its surface revealing the shoddiness of its concrete block construction, the Normanese simplicity of the church yet made a striking and pleasant feature of the High Street scene. Although doomed by the problems of retention, the church held a warm as well as a historic place in our hearts and will be sorely missed.

Fortunately, both "The Gables" and St. John's church are now recorded. The house was captured in time by the joint photographic team from our Society and the Potters Bar Society, and the church, which has often been photographed before, was taken again.

K.k.D.

(Another building which has been lost to us is Bridgefoot House, a Georgian mansion, which was demolished last winter. Changes are also taking place at the seventeenth century Green Man Inn where the external timberwork has been removed. Ed.)

REPORTS.

THE RADCLIFFE-MAUDE REPORT.

On the outcome of this report on the future of local government, which came out early in the summer, will depend the shape of Potters Bar's civic organisation. No decisions have yet been reached but the present Urban District Councils and County Councils alike are threatened with dissolution.

As citizens with historical interests we are doubly concerned in this matter, and we hope that the eventual safeguards will provide a sure and worthy future for the finest building in Potters Bar - Wyllotts Manor, which has been sadly neglected by the P.B.U.D.C. in recent years with the sole excuse that its ultimate use was uncertain! Any successor authority should not neglect this fine asset, but see to its proper restoration and maintenance. Some years ago our Society made specific proposals for its use (including an Arts Centre and a small Museum), and these can be refurbished when the time is ripe - and the guardians of Wyllotts are more mindful of their responsibilities.

HIGH STREET EXCAVATIONS - 1963

John Ashdown's lengthy report with many photographs and drawings is now complete and awaits only final retyping - and publication. This will be an expensive matter.

K.F.D.

FINDS.STONE AXE FOUND IN HADLEY WOOD.

Finds crop up in unexpected places, and are not always what they seem. A resident of Osborne Road possesses a polished stone axe which was found in Hadley Wood about 55 years ago. This is of obviously neolithic appearance, but the high polish and soft stone invite suspicion. Experts at the Spring H.A.C. Symposium at Letchworth examined it and unanimously pronounced it not prehistoric and certainly foreign, perhaps of Polynesian origin.

ROMAN COIN.

We have heard that a Roman Coin has been found recently in a garden in Dugdale Hill Lane. Chance coin finds of this nature do not necessarily imply Roman occupation, but we are interested and would like to know more. Will anyone who has any knowledge of this find please get in touch with the Hon. Secretary?

DIGGERS WANTED.

Next summer we may have to carry out a rescue dig on the site of the former dwelling of Gannocks. This site lies close to the proposed line of the "D" ring road, and may well be irretrievably damaged by the movement of contractors heavy plant situate as it is on what would be an excellent position for one of their depots. Volunteers for this operation are required not only from among members of this Society but from all others who are interested.

In the middle ages Gannocks was the property of the Frowyk family, and came into the possession of the Byngs early in the nineteenth century. In his "South Mimms", published in 1877, Cass states that it was "demolished within living memory".

FORTHCOMING EVENTS. 1969

- Dec. 5th (Friday) - "More Local History from Maps and Records" - Mrs H.W. Baker.
 Jan. 16th (Friday) - "Ancient Monuments in the Shetlands" - Mr. Stuart Friedenson.
 Feb. 26th (Thursday) - "Southern Italy" - Mrs. L. LeGros.
 March 13th (Friday) - "Medieval St. Albans" - Mr. Vaughan Christophers.

NEW MEMBERS.

We welcome the following new members to the Society:-
 Mrs F. Hedger, Mrs J. LeMoine, Miss K.A. Macnair, Mrs O. Polk,
 Miss A. Poulsen, Miss J. Poulsen and Mrs S.M. Sawyer.

Interested people are always welcome as members of the Society, meetings of which are held at Mount Grace Lower School. Full particulars of membership can be obtained from the Honorary Secretary, Mr. R.D.S. Leake, 8 Aberdale Gardens, Potters Bar. The annual subscription for adults is 10/- and for juniors (under 21) 5/-.

Editor

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