



JULY 2015

NEWSLETTER

BALDOCK MUSEUM & LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Coming Events:

Thursday 23rd July: “**Stevenage Through Time**”, following on from last year’s very entertaining talk on “Baldock Through Time”, Hugh Madgin tells the story of our neighbour down the Great North Road and its similarities with Baldock.

Thursday 24th September: **A.G.M., Quiz and Buffet Evening**. After a short summary of the Society’s activities over the year we have a pleasant social evening. There will be a charge of £2 for those having the buffet. **NB: This event will be held in the Baldock Arts and Leisure Centre, Old Town Hall, High Street.**

Thursday 26th November: “**Civil War and Restoration; Baldock in the 17th Century**”, by Brendan King.

All meetings (except the A.G.M.) **will be in the Community Centre, Simpsons Drive**, at 8pm. Non-members admission £2. **Memberships:** single £4, family £6. Payable at our talks or by cheque to the treasurer, Mr. John Merrett, 23 Bush Spring, Baldock SG7 6QT

THE MUSEUM

We are having some difficulty at present in manning the Museum on Wednesdays and consequently have often been running on shortened hours. If any members can spare a couple of hours on a Wednesday (or a Sunday) once every two months, or as often as you wish, to attend the Museum it would be much appreciated. It’s a good opportunity to catch up on your reading or do your paperwork and meet pleasant people – as most visitors are. If you can help please telephone 892640. Museum opening times: Wednesdays 11am-1pm, Sundays 2pm-4pm. Closed mid-December to the end of March.

The present display in the Museum is ‘**Baldock’s Turnpike**’ which describes the works and operation of the Stevenage and Biggleswade Turnpike Trust which was largely run from Baldock. During the 148 years of its existence the Trust made considerable changes to the Great North Road in and around Baldock, notably the cuttings and embankments on the London Road and at Peartree Hill and the demolition of Butcher’s Row in the High Street as well as making great improvements to the road itself. On the staircase we have a display about Elmwood Manor/Place House and its 50 acres of parkland on which the factory that is now TESCO was built. In November the Turnpike display will be temporarily removed for a new display concerning the stories of each of the men named on the

1914-1919 War Memorial. This display will be shown in the ground floor room of the Arts and Heritage Centre on Friday 6th and Saturday 7th November 10am-2pm, and on Sunday 8th November (Remembrance Sunday) immediately after the Remembrance Parade and service in the High Street has finished. It will then be shown in the Museum and remain there until the 17th December. When the Museum reopens at the beginning of March 2016 the Turnpike display will be put up again and remain until the Baldock Festival Street Fair in May.

HISTORICAL SNIPPET

Occasionally one comes across items of local interest in the historical record that do not really fit into the narrative of Baldock's history and it is difficult to know what use can be made of them. One such item concerns a case heard in the court of King's Bench in the Easter Term of 1402. A certain John Sparhauke of Cardiff had been arrested at 'Mondon' (Great or Little Munden, Herts?) for inciting or arousing the people against the King (Henry IV).

The defendant claimed that on Palm Sunday *'after breakfast in a village which lately belonged to the Earl Marshall about one or two miles from Baldock (ie. Weston), he spoke to the wife of a tailor who complained thus: 'See how wet it is and what dreadful weather there is these days and has been all the time of the present King, for there has not been 7 days good and seasonable weather all this time.'* She went on, he said, to say that the King was not the rightful king, nor was he the son of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, but of a butcher of Ghent and that Owen Glendower was the lawful prince of Wales and Cornwall. She also claimed that the Pope had granted an indulgence to all those who assisted Glendower, or the lawful king, the Earl of March; further she complained of the taxes the king had levied and wasted on himself and even blamed him for the weather. The next day the defendant openly repeated all of this at 'Mondon' to several people and was arrested.

Henry had indeed usurped the throne when he overthrew Richard II in 1399 and later had him murdered, so in 1402 his position was not at all secure. Glendower's Welsh uprising in 1400 was a large and dangerous one that was to continue for nine years and in 1403 was to encourage the disaffected Earl of Northumberland, Henry Percy, and his son, Harry 'Hotspur', to rebel. Together Glendower and Northumberland became the focus of a general anti-Lancastrian alliance with the aim of putting Richard's heir presumptive, Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March on the throne.

In this atmosphere seditious ramblings of this sort had to be quickly suppressed, even though some of the claims were untrue. The justices apparently gave no credence to the allegations about the tailor's wife at Weston, no doubt considering that Sparhauke had tried to shift the blame on to her and that it was more likely that it was he who had expressed these views to her, if she had existed at all, while he was in the village. Indeed, when the defendant was asked if *'he had anything to say on his own behalf why he ought not be condemned to death as a traitor'* he said he could not. Nevertheless there appears to have been some reluctance to execute this slightly crazy lone Welshman and it was only after inspecting the evidence and after *'the fullest deliberation with the King's Council'* that Sparhauke was condemned to be drawn (on a tumbrel or hurdle) *'from the Tower through the City to Tyburn, & there to be hanged and afterwards beheaded, & that his head be placed upon Newgate as an example to all beholders.'* By the standards of the age it was a fairly merciful execution for treason.

The story is a rare example of national matters appearing in the local record and demonstrates the means by which news, rumours and opinions, whether true, false or half-true, were spread among the common people and the dangers this could pose to the government.