



JULY 2017

NEWSLETTER

Baldock Museum & Local History Society

MUSEUM NEWS

There is a new display in the Museum called '**Baldock and the Motor Trade**' which looks at the garages and the vehicles they sold. It is also a very interesting and readable short history of the heyday of motoring from the earliest times to the 1950s, with all sorts of odd snippets of information and evocative adverts that will appeal beyond the motor car enthusiast, although the latter is well served by excellent photographs of the types of cars sold in Baldock's garages.

We have also opened up a section of the Old Fire Station again with a slightly altered display of Baldock in 1953 and have used the space to lay out albums covering most of our photographic collection for people to browse through, which has proved popular.

We also have some historic Baldock notelets for sale at £2.50 for a pack of five; they are ideal for 'thank you' cards etc. Do go and have a look at the new display.

COMING EVENTS:

Thursday, 27th July: **“Sermon in Stone; The story of Caldecote Church”** - **Grazyna Tutak** *on the history of the Church of St Mary Magdalene and its recent restoration.*

Thursday, 28th September : **AGM, Quiz and Buffet** *Short AGM followed by pleasant social evening and quiz.*

Thursday 23rd November : **“Some of Baldock's Lost Pubs”** - **Doug Neath** *looks at some of the pubs that once clustered around the Church Street area.*

All talks at Baldock Community Centre, and start at 8pm. All welcome, non-members £2 admission

A NEW SERIES OF TALKS: “HISTORY IN THE AFTERNOON”:

Baldock Arts and Heritage Centre, in co-operation with this Society, has decided to begin a series of daytime talks in the downstairs room of the old Town Hall under the title '**History in the Afternoon**'. The hope is that we might attract people who are not inclined to venture out in the evening and it is hoped it will also be a pleasant social occasion. Both organisations are anxious that this new venture does not attract people away from our evening talks, so we will be using talks that have already been aired by this Society; this will also give those who missed these talks the first time round the chance to hear them. **The cost of admission will be £4 but our members will only pay £3 if they bring their membership cards.** The first two talks will take place later this year:

Friday 15th September: **A Slide Show of Old Baldock:** a short history of Baldock using a selection of slides from the Museum Archives.

Friday 10th November: **The Stories Behind Six Baldock Houses:** The first of Jane Havercroft's very popular series of talks.

Both talks will be in the Old Town Hall and start at 2.30 pm.

A BALDOCK MAN'S PART IN THE FIRST GARDEN CITY

An account of the life of that remarkable Baldockian, James Brown, appeared in the Baldock Mail in December 2009. Brown (1844-1928), resided at the building that is now 18-20 Whitehorse Street from c1880 until his death and had a printing and stationery shop there. At the same time he was the town's postmaster until c.1911 (the Post Office being in his shop). He was also clerk to the magistrates, collector of taxes in Baldock and managing clerk of Veasey, Balderston & Warren (for whom he worked for 70 years). His voluntary work included being a member of the Baldock Fire Brigade and the Volunteers, a Baldock Urban District Councillor, manager of the Council schools and a Methodist lay preacher.



(Above: James Brown's shop. Possibly he is the man on the left and his son, Charles on the right with Mrs. Eliza Brown and Miss Bertha Brown and another)

As the Baldock Mail article explained, it was as managing clerk to Mr. Herbert Warren that his involvement with the Garden City scheme began and, although his part was remembered in the firm for many years after, he is not normally credited in accounts of its beginnings. So it was interesting and pleasing to discover an article by C.B. Purdom (one of the pioneers and founders of the Garden City) in a 1953 copy of the journal *'Town and Country Planning'* celebrating Letchworth's first fifty years, that gave Brown due credit. The article opened with the following words:

"I suppose the real credit for the foundation of the First Garden City at Letchworth should go to James Brown, at that time postmaster at Baldock, who was also managing clerk of Balderston & Warren of that town, and his son Charles Brown. This solicitors' practice had not long before been purchased by Herbert Warren, who was a member of the executive committee of the four-year-old Garden City Association. Warren used to visit Baldock as seldom as he could, for he hated the country, but on those visits he told Brown of the search for an estate for the projected garden city. It so happened that the Letchworth estate was in the market, not anything like enough for the purpose, for it was only about a thousand acres, but Brown thought that various other properties could be secured, and set about making enquiries. What was wanted was an area of from four to six thousand acres in a ring fence, and Brown succeeded in getting contracts for 3,882 acres from fifteen different owners. It was a remarkable achievement, for enquiries had to be made in the utmost secrecy; but everything was got, even glebe lands, without the secret leaking out. This was done in the summer of 1903; the contracts were signed, the deposits paid out of the £20,000 capital of the pioneer company, and First Garden City Limited was incorporated in September to complete the purchases and develop the town.*

There was only one serious failure in the land purchases, the inability of the Browns and Warren to persuade the owner of the land on Letchworth Hill, between the Letchworth Estate and the village of Walsworth, to sell; but she was adamant."

Purchasing a suitable estate of the right size and situation was a problem that might easily have stopped the Garden City dreamers in their tracks. It took a man with local knowledge and common sense to make the dream a reality. The story goes that when Brown and Warren were driving to view the estate, the horse threw a shoe which James Brown kept as a good omen for the project.

*In fact Warren was the late Alexander Balderston's nephew and had been in partnership with *him*.