

NEWSLETTER

BALDOCK MUSEUM AND LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

The Town Hall

We are happy to say that the lease has now been signed by the Town Hall Group and NHDC so we are set to proceed. It has taken quite a long time to sort out the details but both sides were keen for the project to get started.

The lease will run for 99 years at a low rent but with a full repairing obligation. On an awkward building like this maintenance will be a considerable problem, even minor maintenance is an expensive matter. Having understood that there were going to be no funds available from NHDC to help us it was a pleasant surprise when they announced that money would be found to put the building into a reasonably usable condition (it has been allowed to fall into a very poor state of repair in recent years). The

direction of these works has been put into the hands of the THG because they should be able to make available funds go further.

It is hoped that volunteers will come forward to do the decorating, carpentry, plumbing, electrics, carpets etc. Perhaps some of our members might be interested in brightening up our end of the building? If so, please call the chairman on 892640.

The THG is about to apply for charitable status for the Town Hall as an Arts and Heritage Centre. In effect they will be trustees of Thomas Pryor's gift to the town, maintaining it for purposes as close to his intentions as it is practical to do, given that the Council has no use for it and we cannot use it as a rival community centre.

Coming Events

(Please note change of venue for AGM)

Thursday 25th July **Baldock Houses: More Tales of the Unexpected** *Jane Havercroft*

Continuing this popular series of interesting snippets about various houses around the town

Thursday 26th Sept **AGM, Quiz and Buffet Evening**

Find out what the Society has been doing over the last year and what the plans are for the future followed by a pleasant social get-together with no risk of being asked to do anything! There will be a charge of £2 to help towards the cost of the buffet. **8 pm United Reformed Church, Whitehorse Street (near the Post Office)**

Thursday 28th Nov **A History of Bygrave** *Duncan Hector*

This will be the first time we have had an account of our close neighbour

All Meetings (except 26th September) at Baldock Community Centre at 8.00 pm.

Visitors welcome £1.50.

NB: One hot summer we advertised the Museum as the coolest place in Baldock. With the recent long, cold winters this has gone beyond a joke so we have decided that the Museum will

close from mid-December to the end of February. If you want to buy any local history books as Christmas presents do it early!

STOP PRESS! Just as we go to print a new booklet arrives "*Memories of Caldecote; Life in Hertfordshire's smallest Village 1900-2000*" by Peter Robbins. It has 24 pages and many illustrations and looks interesting. Cop-

ies at £3.50 (inc p&p) from 1 Farm Cottages, Caldecote, Baldock, Herts SG7 5LD. Proceeds to the church restoration fund.

1912 in Baldock

The new display in the Museum is called “Preparing for War; The Battle of Radwell and Baldock’s part in the 1912 Army Manoeuvres.” The display has been mounted by Frank Foy and we are very grateful to him for the time and effort he has put into it.

Anticipating the possibility of a German invasion these exercises, which covered a large part of Eastern England, were aimed at assessing the logistics necessary in moving large numbers of troops, horses and artillery around the railway network whilst keeping them fed and supplied. It seems to have been a successful undertaking and no doubt played its part in easing troop movements when war came in 1914.

As far as Baldock was concerned it was the biggest event to have hit the town for years, perhaps centuries. Thousands of cavalry, infantry and artillery passed through the town and a “battle” between cavalry of the invading and defending forces took place at Radwell whilst, on another occasion a battery of field guns engaged the opposition behind Salisbury Road.

A brigade of cavalry with artillery comprising the Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorsetshire Yeomanry set up camp on either side of the Letchworth Road on the (present) school playing fields and Avenue Park - 1,800 men and 1,500 horses in all requiring the Council to provide 25,000 gallons of water. The first aircraft were seen and an airship at an “immense height.” One aeroplane even landed at the camp attracting a crowd of interested spectators.

New Book on Baldock

There is a new book, called “Baldock Through Time” by Hugh Madgin, on sale in the Museum. It has 96 pages and 180 illustrations and costs £14.99 of which about £5 will go to Museum funds.

It is an attractively produced book in a “then and now” format with an old photograph on each page and a modern colour photograph of the same view below. It contains some interesting and unusual photographs (including one of the 1912 Yeomanry Camp included above) although many others are probably quite familiar to most of you.

The captions to the photographs are short and quite informative. However it would be as well to mention that, as far as we know (and Mr Madgin has not given his sources) the old inn on page 74 was the Angel Inn and not the Albion; that the “Pretty Lamp” (p 79) was in Church

Other units passing through were also billeted in various maltings around the town. One such, the 7th Devon Cycle Corps, recalled their time here with pleasure, toasting “The Town and People of Baldock” at their annual dinner in Exeter.

The excitement that these manoeuvres brought to this quiet little town for a few weeks in 1912 was almost lost to memory as they were overtaken by the greater events of 1914-1918. The numerous postcards produced to commemorate the occasion were later often presumed to be of the wartime period and have been re-identified for the display.

So please go along to the Museum and read all about it.



Baldock Camp in September 1912 looking towards New Farm (From Hugh Madgin’s new book “Baldock Through Time”)

Street and that the caption on page 24 about the George is rather misleading; because now they are in print they will quickly become “facts”!

Now that the dust has settled over the town-centre refurbishment of 2008/9 it is interesting to reflect on the changes again. This book, of course, mainly shows a comparison with pre-war Baldock when we really ought to compare it with pre-refurbishment Baldock. Some things look rather good: Hitchin Street for example, or the cover photograph of the High Street, but Whitehorse Street has been badly spoilt by the awful street lights and other street furniture. If you stand at the traffic lights on the Royston Road side and look down the street you see it at its worst. In the picture on page 40 you will see that the lights on Royston Road itself are less obtrusive. It is a great shame – so much for the Conservation Area.

We still need some more Museum volunteers who can do a couple of hours every 8 weeks (or less or more as required). Please telephone 892640.