

## HEMPSTEAD'S HISTORY

I'd like to thank all the people who have contacted me with documents, photos and details of their houses, as well as those who have taken the time and trouble to be interviewed about their recollections and stories of village life in the recent past.

Most people equate Hempstead history with Dick Turpin and the Harvey family, but there is so much more to it than that. I have already discovered stories which will be unfamiliar to many of us: the connection between our village and Whittlesford Primary School, via a Cambridge grocer born in the reign of James II; the collapse of the church tower in 1882 and the 90 year struggle to rebuild it; the curious pattern of glebe lands scattered around the village; the teenage sugar boilers who commuted to Thaxted six days a week in 1921; a disappearing wood; and the emigration 'farm colony' which was run at Hempstead Hall throughout the first half of the last century, training thousands of young men for a new life in the Dominions. Many of these will be the basis for future articles in *Ambo*, and new mysteries will surely emerge the more we learn.

**The new website is now live, and you can see all the progress that has been made at [www.hempsteadhistory.uk](http://www.hempsteadhistory.uk). (Note that there is no 'org' in this address).**

Being ready and being finished are not the same thing. As I said before, this project will never be finished: it is not designed to be, although it will evolve and grow. With your help, we can first correct what I am sure will be many errors and

omissions. We also encourage everyone please to submit material: information about your house, old photographs and documents or the results of your own researches. We are already compiling a list of tasks: puzzles to be solved, biographical details to be unearthed, census returns to be transcribed and/or analysed, gravestones to be catalogued and many more. We will need an army of volunteers to help!

In putting this website together, we have had to stop somewhere; and so we have arbitrarily decided to 'end history' in 1985. This of course excludes recent events such as the various jubilee celebrations, the birth of the Hempstead Dramatic Society and the ongoing saga of the Bluebell. There is plenty of material about all of these and future archivists will surely add it when some context is available. But for the time being, the social history of the previous 900 years is sufficiently interesting that we don't want to lose it in a mass of material that is still fresh in the memory.

For a similar reason, we have arbitrarily taken the start date as 1066. This is not to say that there was nothing of interest before the Conquest – far from it. There are excavations with finds dating back to the late Bronze Age; there was certainly settled farming here in the Iron Age and a stable rural community during the Roman occupation and in Saxon times. This has been extensively documented by the Essex Archaeological Society and others, and trying to duplicate or summarise their work could never do it justice. In any case, this material would not really belong in what is meant to be a social history.

Please let me know what you think about the website and whether/how you can contribute to its further development. If you find inaccuracies – which is inevitable – please tell me. You can email me at [info@hempsteadhistory.uk](mailto:info@hempsteadhistory.uk) or ring me on 07933 766570.

**DATE FOR THE DIARY - IN THE VILLAGE HALL ON SATURDAY 14 SEPTEMBER, 5.00 - 6.30 PM, WHEN ROSS WILL RECOUNT A FEW OF THE STORIES THAT HE HAS UNCOVERED SO FAR.**

There will be a modest exhibition of documents and photos and an opportunity for people to ask questions and/or volunteer to join the research team. If the weather is kind, we may extend the evening into a 'Pimms on the Patio' style social event.

*Ross Midgley*

