



News and events

- **The Mill.** A new application to refurbish the north end of The Mill has been submitted to SADC, ref. 5/2020/0138. It is very similar to the earlier application but with an improved Heritage Statement.
- **The Old Bakery.** Listed building consent to 'restore and repair' the Old Bakery was granted on 22 January, ref. 5/19/2209. The conditions are quite stringent, e.g. that all materials must be approved before they are used and that a record of all the works must be kept and archived. The owners must produce a 'public engagement strategy'. Please register on the website www.theoldbakerywheathampstead.co.uk
- **Next meeting:** Our next meeting will be at 7.30 on Wednesday 18 March when Ken Griffin will give a talk 'Gallows Hill and Hertfordshire Executions'.

Notes and queries

Murder at the pub – fake news?

As a result of technological innovations of the last twenty years or so, local historians now live in a land of plenty. Much primary source material that was previously held in archives, perhaps located hundreds of miles away, is now available at the click of the button. The British Newspaper Archive is a case in point. You can now search millions of pages of digitised newspaper reports from the last 300 years from your own front room rather than traipse down to the old newspaper library in Colindale and spend hours flicking from page to page trying to find something. A quick word search on your computer is more efficient. Interesting stories abound, a local one being this short report of a murder.



In its edition of 15 April 1765 (page 1), the *Salisbury Journal* reported that:

'Thursday last, two men quarreling at a public house in Whitehamstead, a small village 4 miles from Redburn, one of them took the other and laid him behind the fire, where he held him so long, that, notwithstanding a surgeon was sent for, he expired soon after in great agonies. The inhuman wretch was taken into custody, and committed to Hertford gaol.'

Don't be put off by the spellings – what appear as aberrations to us were par for the course at the time. And don't be surprised that a Hertfordshire story appears in a Hampshire newspaper. Editors

needing to fill up space would often shamelessly reproduce content from London or other provincial papers. Moreover, terrible stories such as this from anywhere in the country provided good copy.

Having worked on our society's pub history research group, my interest was piqued by the report. Could we identify from surviving records the public house and its spacious fireplace? While some useful records for Hertfordshire murders are online, visits to the record office at Hertford (HALS) and also the National Archives (TNA) at Kew would be necessary. This would take time. Thankfully, for topics such as this, there is a way to short-circuit the research process: email Ken Griffin. He is building up a large database of local murders. Had he come across the story?

Sadly, he had not. Ken tells me he checked the Assize records held at The National Archives, coroners' bills for attending to suspicious or unexplained deaths that are kept at HALS, and online burial records for Wheathampstead, Harpenden and Sandridge. All to no avail.

So, did the murder take place as reported? Judging from Ken's assessment, it appears very unlikely.

Jon Mein

