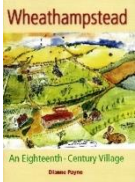




News and events



The special offer to buy Dianne Payne's new book *Wheathampstead: An Eighteenth Century Village* expires on 31 March. To order your copy for £10 (RRP £15), please email dianne.payne14@btinternet.com with your name, address and phone number. Your copy can be collected from Dianne's house in The Folly or posted for £3.

Notes and queries

Town Farm

This year sees the 50th anniversary of the destruction of Town Farm which had stood, together with two barns, on the corner opposite The Swan since the late 15th century. On Saturday 8 May 1971 it was demolished by bulldozers in just a few hours.



Crucially, the building was not listed under the 1968 Town and Country Planning Act. The owners, Maltglade Developments, had applied to St Albans Rural District Council to build 11 houses on the site but, when the application came to the full Council on Monday 3 May, it was agreed that a Temporary Preservation Order should be placed on the building. The Order was posted to Maltglade's office in Luton by recorded delivery on the following day. However, the postman was unable to find the office on Friday 7 May and the Order was not delivered.

A gang of workmen started the demolition early on the Saturday morning. Within minutes, villagers and parish councillors were alerted and came to the site, followed by the police and Council officials. Councillor Geoffrey Dickens showed the foreman a copy of the Preservation Order but he said he had no such instructions

from Maltglade. The Farm and the barns had gone by lunchtime.

Recriminations started immediately. At an angry special meeting of the Rural District Council in the following week the council surveyor threatened to sue a councillor for slander and another councillor attacked the competence of the Clerk. In June, the Council refused Maltglade's application to build 11 houses. In the meantime, a petition signed by 1100 villagers called on the Council to compulsorily purchase the site and prosecute Maltglade.

The case was heard at St Albans Magistrates Court on 8 October when the arguments hinged on whether the Temporary Preservation Order had been served. The Post Office confirmed that the letter to Maltglade could not be delivered and Maltglade's lawyer argued that this meant the Order had not been served and was therefore not in force. Nevertheless, the defendants were found guilty of demolishing a preserved building and were fined a total of £205 with costs.

They appealed to the High Court and in May 1972 the convictions and fines were 'reluctantly' set aside. The Court found them wrong in law, proof of posting of the Order not being sufficient evidence of it having been served, so it had never come into force. The Council was refused leave to appeal to the House of Lords and had to pay Maltglade's costs for attending the hearing.

In June 1972, Maltglade's application to build 10 houses was approved by Herts County Council, leaving the Rural District Council unable to object.