



News and events

- Beech Hyde School is planning a celebration of the 50th anniversary of its founding in 1971. The school is inviting memories of early days at the school to be sent to 50years@beechhyde.herts.sch.uk.
- The Herts Association for Local History Spring Meeting and AGM will be held via Zoom on 15 May, with a talk on *Hertfordshire Place Names* by Dr John Baker at 3.15. For more information see <http://www.halh.org.uk/>

Chennells account book

Among our archives is an enormous ledger, a gift from Wally Overman (born 1910) who worked at the Blackbridge Dump from 1935 to 1978.

The ledger includes 144 pages of accounts, dating from 1902 to 1920, compiled by Mr Chennells the village grocer. They list every individual item, its cost, and the date when it was bought by his few account-holding customers, among whom are some interesting names including Mary Countess of Cavan, Rev. O.W. Davys and A. Harmsworth Esq., later Lord Northcliffe, the powerful press baron. He visited his fishing lodge in Wheathampstead between 1903 and 1905, causing much excitement as he arrived in his Rolls Royce Silver Ghost.



The lodge is now *The Fishery*, Lower Luton Road.

What does the Chennells account book tell us about life at the fishing lodge in the early 1900s?

There were regular orders for what one assumes were dog biscuits. A hundredweight of 'meat biscuits' cost 15s. A sack of corn cost 17s, maize

was cheaper at 16s. Did they also keep chickens? For cooking, presumably, two gallons of oil cost 1s 8d. Vermin killer cost 6d, mouse poison 1s 6d. A lady may have joined the party on 7th January 1904 as three curl papers and a bottle of plums were ordered, costing 11½d. Tea, butter, sugar, bacon, cream and salt were regular food orders. Also fairly regular were orders for syphons of soda water, usually a dozen at a time at £2 2s 6d. Two dozen bottles of beer were ordered on 8th July 1904 which, together with a bag of corn at 11s, amounted to a total of 13s. It seems that 24 bottles of beer in 1904 cost a mere two shillings, or 24 pence – so, a penny a bottle. An intriguing order on 31 August 1903 was for 100 best cartridges costing 10s 6d. Had they been invited to the Brocket estate for a shoot?

Accounts are an important source for local history and can raise almost as many questions as answers. Speculation can be rife, but they are certainly more interesting than commonly thought. Chennells the grocer's accounts offer a fresh insight into the daily life of the better-off people in the village and their visitors. Most local people would not have been entitled to an account but paid for their purchases on the spot. However, Wally Overman recalled how the men who worked at The Dump ran up enormous £5 tallies at the Red Lion for their beer when it was a penny a pint, so they at least were allowed some credit!

Ruth Jeavons