



Wheathampstead History Society

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News and events

Our "Walk and talk" programme got off to a good start on Saturday 17 July when over a dozen members joined Mike Smith for a three mile walk around six of the 12 arable fields that were mentioned in a document called the 1315 Extenta of Wheathampstead manor. Later in the year, we hope to run at least two more walks focusing on Saxon Wheathampstead and the fulling mill on Melissa Field.

Allotments

The popularity of allotments has been growing steadily in recent years and even more in the last 18 months. In one form or another, allotments have been a feature of the English landscape for hundreds of years, possibly from as far back as the Anglo-Saxon period, but the arrangements in force today, whereby local councils manage the system, have their origins in the 19th century.

Wheathampstead Parish Council is responsible for four allotment sites with 186 plots. It owns the Baxendale site at The Slype and Folly Fields at The Folly and rents Hitchens and Glebe, which make up the large site on Marford Road, from Herts County Council and St Albans Diocese respectively. See wheathampstead-pc.gov.uk/allotments-and-grazing

The Allotments Act 1887 laid the foundations of the current system by allowing local sanitary districts to acquire land, including by compulsory purchase, for allotments to be let to tenants. A series of further Acts culminated in the 1908 Act which required local authorities, usually parish or district councils, to provide enough allotments to meet local demand. By 1914, there were between 450,000 and 600,000 allotments in England.

With the outbreak of World War 1, the nation's food supply became at risk from enemy action at sea and, with many agricultural labourers away fighting at the Front, the need for better food security became urgent. The Wheathampstead school logbooks from 1914 to 1919 reveal great efforts to respond to this need. Minutes from the school managers' meeting on 23 November 1914 record the headmaster's request for County

Council sanction to teach gardening and the trustees of the school playing field at The Wick agreed that a portion of the land might be adapted for that purpose. Subsequent entries record how more plots were brought into use in the following years, including eight acres in Canon Davys' field, and the quantity of vegetables produced – including two cwt of onions and 30 cwt of potatoes in autumn 1917.

'Outlying portions' of the Brocket Estate were put up for auction in 1919, including Hitchens Field (the western part of the Marford Road site) which was advertised as 'Very Valuable Building Land' currently let to Wheathampstead Parish Council and used as allotments. The Council approached the vendor

who agreed to sell the land for £250, far below its market value, on condition that it was



used as allotments. Hertfordshire County Council bought the five acre field and leased it to the Parish Council. Glebe Field, the eastern part of the Marford Road site, is let to the Parish Council by the owner, the Diocese of St Albans. The Parish Council owns the Folly and Baxendale allotments, the latter so called because the plot was owned by the Baxendales of Blackmore End who let it to the Council early in the 20th century.