



News and events

- **Next meeting: Wednesday 19 January.** The talk will be 'A History of Wheathampstead in X Objects'. The value of X is yet to be agreed. How many 'objects' can be covered in the time available? This is a talk-in-progress and members will be invited to suggest objects that might be included in later versions of the talk.
- HALH have announced their programme of Zoom talks for January to March 2022. Topics include the history of Hamels Mansion in Braughing, 'Panshanger after Repton', and the great barns around St Albans. Details at www.halh.org.uk

Saving Barton House

We can all enjoy visiting the Brewhouse Café and Wheathampstead Wellbeing Centre in Barton House on Brewhouse Hill but it is thanks to my grandfather, Charlie Collins, that this is possible.

Barton House, together with the tunnel that runs underneath it, was built in the 1780s and operated as a brewery until 1904. By 1908 it was occupied by residential tenants, along with the three adjoining cottages.



Charlie Collins

In 1938 the St Albans Rural District Council (SARDC) served a Clearance Order on the then owner, Frank

Chennells, on the grounds that the building was unfit

for human habitation. It should be vacated within five months and demolished within a further six weeks. The Order was confirmed at a public enquiry in February 1939 but the outbreak of war in September resulted in all such Orders being temporarily suspended. In the meantime, Charlie Collins had rented part of the building to use for storing antique furniture for the business that he and his brother Fred had founded in 1907.

Frank Chennells died in February 1951 and the Council advised his executors that the temporary suspension of the Order had ended and that, as soon as the current tenants, including Charlie Collins, vacated the premises, the Clearance Order should be implemented.

Charlie immediately launched a campaign against the Order, basing it on the fact that he intended to repair the building and use it as a store and showroom for his antiques business. In extensive correspondence between 1951 and 1954, of which I have the originals, he invoked

support from the distinguished architect and writer Sir Albert Richardson, the Marquis of Salisbury, the St Albans MP John Grimston, the ministers for Housing and for Health, Hertfordshire Local History Council, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, historian W Branch Johnson, local solicitor R de Mornay Davies, George Titmuss, and other local worthies. The Council, however, repeatedly insisted that the Clearance Order could not be revoked.

The 1954 Housing Act was a turning point. In the light of its provisions, SARDC wrote to Charlie saying that they could license the building for use as a store for a maximum of three years if it could be brought up to an acceptable standard. He then bought Barton House and the cottages for £750, still subject to the Clearance Order.

In September 1955 Charlie's architect reported that demolishing the building would destabilise the tunnel and the road would collapse into it. Charlie also claimed that the building should be



Barton House 1960s

listed under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953.

The breakthrough came in March 1956. SARDC reviewed the entire situation and licensed the building for use as a storeroom etc until August 1957. This was extended until, in

September 1959, permission was granted to develop Barton House as a showroom, store and local museum.

The entire building was repaired and refurbished in the 1960s. Charlie's efforts were finally rewarded in 1971 when Barton House was listed Grade II as a building of special architectural and historic interest.

Anne Atton (née Collins)