



Wheathampstead History Society

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Latest news

- As you may know, the Old Bakery building in Station Road, until recently the carpet shop, is to be re-opened as a restaurant and tea-room. Work on the building will start soon. The new owners are very conscious of its importance as a listed building. There will be no change to the external appearance and no structural changes to the historic interior, though some modern partitions will be removed. Work is also needed to deal with damp and woodworm. We will keep you informed.
- **Next meeting:** Wednesday 21 February. Rudi Newman will give a talk about the social and economic impact of the arrival of the railways in the Chiltern area in the nineteenth century.

Notes and Queries

EVACUATE WHEATHAMPSTEAD!

This was the tongue-in-cheek message from George Bernard Shaw of Ayot St Lawrence and his friend Apsley Cherry-Garrard of South Pole fame who lived at Lamer Park. Mr Shaw was writing to St. Albans Rural District Council in the summer of 1931 regarding the Blackbridge Tip which at that time was in full operation at its site to the north-east of the village, bounded by



Sheepcote Lane to the west, Codicote Road to the north, and the railway line to the south. The Tip even had its own spur to the railway line, as shown in the picture.

Why would the great George Bernard Shaw be suggesting this and where were the residents of the village to go? Answer: to Islington. Why Islington? Because Islington was sending its rubbish to infill the old gravel pits at Blackbridge.

London had been sending a large amount of rubbish to us since Victorian times but by the 1930s Islington was the main culprit. Shaw had been complaining to the Rural District Council since 1922 but 1931 seems to have been the last straw, perhaps because it was a hot summer. An unbearable stink from the Tip must have pervaded the village but, worse, there was a

plague of flies. Shaw likened this to the plague in the Book of Exodus, where God sent flies to Egypt. As Shaw said, Pharaoh might have deserved this but what had we done in Hertfordshire? He likened the smell to Stromboli, Etna, Vesuvius and Hell. Cherry-Garrard commented that there was little to choose between the horror of mid-winter at the South Pole and mid-summer at Lamer Park.

What was the outcome of all this? Islington Borough Council sent members of their Cleansing Committee to investigate and they concluded that they were "perfectly satisfied that no nuisance is being caused". The rubbish was supposed to be covered with nine inches of earth but the coverage was neither consistent nor complete. Much of the rubbish caught fire, causing the overpowering smell, and flies bred in the unburned areas.

Shaw's complaints do not seem to have had much effect because the Tip did not close until the mid-1970s. It is still closed to the public, fenced off and with Keep Out signs. The area is home to many species of birds, wild flowers, deer, foxes, rabbits and reptiles.

Margaret Pankhurst

We are always on the lookout for old photos.

Does anyone have a photo of the Folly Chapel, or the Methodist Chapel on The Hill, before they were modified or converted?